

ORTON NURSERY AND PLANTATION OPERATIONS FROM ABOUT 1939 THROUGH 1960, BRUNSWICK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA



Cover photographs are stills from the ca. 1949 Tom Draper 16mm color film, "Orton Plantation Under Spring Skies."

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Prepared By:
Michael Trinkley, Ph.D.
and
Debi Hacker

Prepared For:
Belvedere Property Management, LLC
1251 Avenue of the Americas, 17th Floor
New York, NY 10020

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Chicora Foundation, Inc.
PO Box 8664
Columbia, SC 29202
803-787-6910
www.chicora.org

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

Like too many commercial enterprises, very few records have survived to document the history of Orton Plantation's gardens and nursery. Historical accounts, such as the cultural landscape report by Knott and her colleagues have relied on salvaged bits and pieces scattered at various repositories.

This document assembles the currently known records of the plantation gardens and nursery, including correspondence and bills dating from 1937 through 1943, along with bank and accounting records dating from 1963 through 1973. While still resulting in a less than thorough historical overview, this study does address a previously ignored aspect of southeastern plantations – their development and operation during the twentieth century.

The research explores the business operations of Orton Plantation, including its agricultural production, forestry operations, the development and operation of its public gardens, and the activities of the Orton Plantation Nursery. The research has resulted in assembling a near complete history of plantation superintendents or managers, as well as other staff. The document explores the interactions between the gardens and the nursery, looking at the plants that were brought in and that were sold. Valuable information concerning Orton's response to the camellia petal blight of the late 1940s and early 1950s is also assembled.

The investigations help document the evolution of the Orton gardens through various landscape plans, revealing that the gardens represent a very dynamic landscape that was constantly changing. Similarly, it helps to document the growth and modifications that occurred in the nursery, tracking greenhouses, slat houses, irrigation systems, and even pesticide usage.

There is almost no literature dealing with the history of nursery production in the Southeastern United States. This study begins to help fill that void.

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Introduction

Historical research at Orton has focused on the plantation and its owners prior to the twentieth century; relatively little attention has been directed to the twentieth century plantation landscape, gardens, and nursery. The exception, of course, is the very detailed research shown by the cultural landscape report for Orton (Laura Knott and her colleagues (Knott et al. 2014).

This current study expands on the earlier work, focusing on the contributions that can be offered by the remnant business papers for the plantation and its nursery from 1938 to 1943, although both earlier and later information has been added. The result is a new view of Orton operations and gardens during the twentieth century. While as thorough as possible at this point in time, we have no doubt that additional

resources will continue to be uncovered and the Orton story will be refined and perhaps portions will even be rewritten.

An Introduction to Orton

Orton Plantation is situated on the west bank of the Cape Fear River in Brunswick County, about midway between Wilmington, to the north in New Hanover County, and Southport (historically known as Smithville) to the south in Brunswick County (Figure 1).

Orton and Kendal were settled by Roger Moore in the first half of the eighteenth century and then went through a long series of different owners (Trinkley and Hacker 2012, Knott et al. 2014, and Trinkley and Hacker 2016). In 2010, a descendant of Roger Moore, Louis Moore Bacon, began acquiring the ancestral Orton lands, assembling the property under the name of Orton Plantation Holding, LLC ("Builder's Descendent Buys Part of Orton Plantation," *Star News*, Wilmington, NC, May 6, 2010). Nearly 7,000 acres of Orton are today under a perpetual conservation easement with the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust. This ensures the protection of the historic boundary of the plantation by including woodlands, agricultural fields, restored rice fields, water courses and gardens. The National Register of Historic Places boundary has been expanded to approximately 1,100 acres. In addition, Mr. Bacon has funded extensive

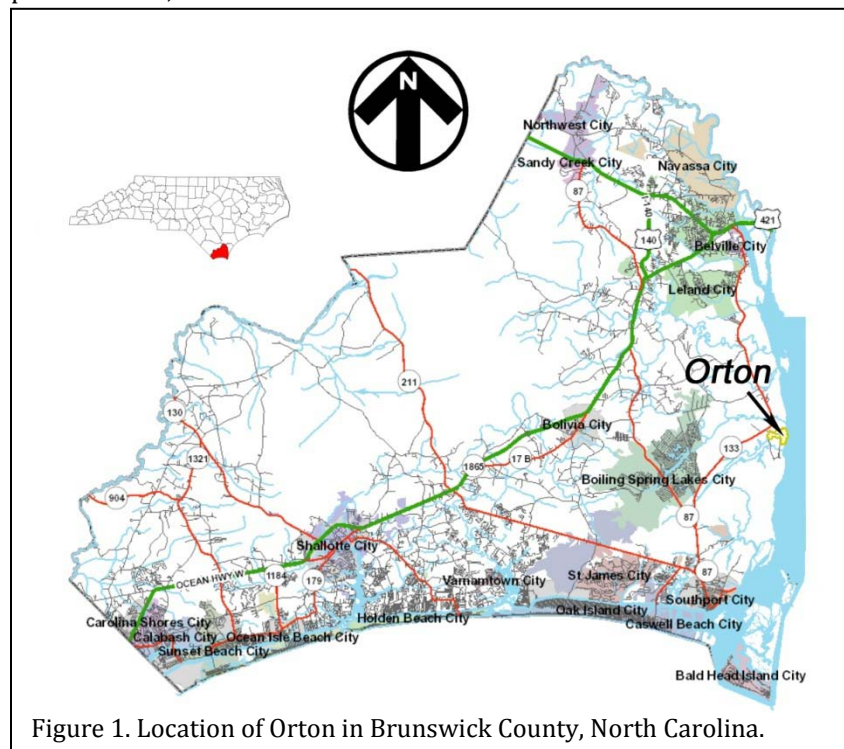


Figure 1. Location of Orton in Brunswick County, North Carolina.

INTRODUCTION

research into the history and archaeology of the Orton and Kendal Plantations, including this current study of Orton's nursery.

Brunswick County is in the Inner Coastal Plain and ranges in elevation from sea level to 75 feet above mean sea level (AMSL). At higher elevations, the land is dissected to form gently rolling hills and valleys. In the vicinity of Orton Plantation elevations range from about 5 to 20 feet AMSL.

The physiography is dominated by the Cape Fear River. The tidal range at Fort Caswell, situated at the mouth of the Cape Fear and essentially representing oceanic tides, is about 6.7 feet. The measured salinity of the water at this location is 24ppt. Open ocean salinity is generally in the range from 32 to 37ppt. About 16 miles upriver, at the mouth of Town Creek, the tidal range is about 6.2 feet and the salinity drops to an average of about 15ppt, with a low of 6ppt and a high of 27ppt – falling into what would be considered brackish water. As one moves up the creek the tidal range decreases and salinities drop to an average of 10ppt (Hackney 2007).

All of the soils in Brunswick County are formed by coastal plain sediment or by sediment deposited by streams flowing through the County. Orton is found on the Baymeade-Blanton-Norfolk Soil Association. These consist of nearly level to gently sloping, well drained and moderately well drained soils that have a loamy subsoil on the uplands. While many such areas in the county have been under agriculture, the soils tend to leach nutrients and are susceptible to wind damage. Most of the plantation upland soils are Blanton fine sands, 0-5% slopes. These are moderately well drained soils formed on slightly convex divides near drainages.

Brunswick County is hot and humid in the summer, although the coastal area is moderated by ocean breezes, typically from the south-southwest. In the winter the area is cool and damp with occasional very cold spells.

In the summer the average temperature is

78°F and the average high is 86°F. The average winter temperature is 47°F and the average daily minimum is 37°F. The average relative humidity is about 60%, although the dawn average is about 85%.

Average rainfall is about 55 inches, falling throughout the year. About 32 inches, or 60%, usually falls during the growing season of April through September. The area has a growing season of 265 days. This, combined with the rainfall levels, creates a climate that is supportive of a range of Southeastern crops.

Küchler (1964) identified the potential natural vegetation of the Brunswick County area as his Southern Mixed Forest, although in close proximity were larger areas of Oak-Hickory Pine Forest and Pocosin.

The Southern Mixed Forest, described as a tall forest of broadleaf deciduous, evergreen, and needleleaf evergreen trees, is dominated by beech, sweet gum, southern magnolia, slash pine, loblolly pine, white oak, and laurel oak. The adjacent Oak-Hickory-Pine Forest is a medium tall to tall forest of broadleaf deciduous and needleleaf evergreen trees. The pocosin areas were low, open forests of needleleaf evergreen trees (mostly pond pine) and broadleaf evergreen low trees (primarily gall berry).

Today, Brunswick County vegetation consist of a patchwork of various ecosystems mixed with agricultural fields and urban development.

On upland areas are remnant longleaf pine savannahs, mixed pine and hardwood forests (consisting of loblolly pine, sweetgum, maple, hickory, white oak, water oak, and willow oak), pine flatwoods (with uneven-aged loblolly pines in the overstory and deciduous plants in understory), pine plantations, and pine scrub (longleaf pine, turkey oak, and wiregrass).

Lowland areas consists of floodplain forests (cypress, black gum, green ash, water oak, willow oak, and hackberry), pocosins (peat soils

dominated by evergreen shrubs, pond pine, and wax myrtle), and Carolina Bays where vegetation may range from that found in pocosins to various bays.

Also present are Maritime Forests, wetlands, and stream edge areas with distinct vegetation systems. Wetland areas ranging from sea grass meadows to coastal salt marshes to freshwater marshes are also present.

Recently there have been extensive modifications returning much of the vegetation to an earlier stage. The loblolly plantations have been removed in order to regenerate longleaf pine ("Work at Orton Will Encourage Longleaf Pine Growth," *Star News* (Wilmington, NC), June 10, 2011). Modifications of wetland areas, which introduced invasive species, are being removed in order to allow the fields to once again be planted in rice ("Orton's Old is New," *Star News* (Wilmington, NC), March 23, 2012).

Synopsis of Orton During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

With the 1884 purchase, Col. Kenneth M. Murchison became the sole owner of Orton, its saw mill, mill pond, rice fields, and "fine dwelling house" (Brunswick County Register of Deeds, DB BB, pg. 527). By this time Murchison was 53 years old and a very successful merchant who spent most of his time in New York. He apparently didn't retire until about 1900 after which he began to spend more of his time "in the congenial and quiet atmosphere of Orton plantation" (*Morning Star*, Wilmington, NC, June 5, 1904). Nevertheless, he was always listed in the New York census, suggesting that Orton was primarily a winter residence and financial investment.

The plantation was growing rice and sending it to Wilmington for processing. This work was apparently under the supervision of Captain Samuel R. Chinnis, a Confederate veteran who worked at Orton from at least 1888 until his death in 1891. While Murchison was at Orton

primarily in the winter when the area was safer from malaria, he also hosted hunting and fishing parties during other seasons, keeping a pack of "twenty fine dogs" including a number from the "best strains of the English foxhound" for his hunting entertainment ("Fine Sport at Orton," *Morning Star*, Wilmington, NC, January 11, 1898). The local papers periodically mentioned hunting ducks, deer, fox, alligators, turkeys, and even eagle, one of which "measuring six feet three inches from tip to tip" ("Game From Orton," *Weekly Star*, Wilmington, NC, December 3, 1897).

While rice continued to be planted, Orton was less profitable than Kendal to the north, likely because Kendal's owner, Frederic Kidder, was intimately involved in its operation, while Murchison viewed the property more a resort spot. The property was largely left in the hands of African Americans.

In January 1893, a long-time African American laborer on Orton, Henry Wiggins, "died suddenly of heart disease." The news accounts described him as "one of the best men on the plantation" and as "an old and trusted employee" (*Morning Star*, Wilmington, NC, January 1, 1893).

Other references to the plantation's African American laborers revolve around a "cake walk" held by Murchison in March 1893 for his entertainment. Described as an "old time festivity." The "master of ceremonies" was Daniel Robinson, Murchison's New York butler and twenty or more couples – all "young colored people employed on the plantation" – participated. The winners were Charles Patterson with Josephine Watters, and John Pearson with Phoebe Mills ("Cake Walk at Orton," *Weekly Star*, Wilmington, NC, March 24, 1893).

Murchison held another "cake walk" the Christmas of 1894, with the local paper noting such events were always of "great delight of the darkies." This time "prizes" were given for the "most graceful" – won by Friday Pickett and partner – and the "most awkward" – won by John E. Pearson and partner ("Christmas at Orton," *Weekly Star*, December 28, 1894).

The 1897 crop at Orton was described as “the largest crop grown in the county” that year, 13,000 bushels (“Rice Crop in Brunswick,” *Morning Star*, Wilmington, NC, March 5, 1898).

At least by the turn of the century Captain J.C. Smith, shown in the 1900 census as a steamboat captain, was the manager of Orton. His

divided among his five living children, Luola M. Sprunt, Jane M. Ellis, Jesse M. Carter, Kenneth M. Murchison, Jr., and Marion Hurkamp.

Murchison’s real estate holdings included the 9,000 acre Orton Plantation, valued at \$25,000. In contrast, Murchison’s two lots in Wilmington that included the Orton Hotel, stores,

and a warehouse were valued at \$75,000. Even Murchison’s half interest in Caney River Plantation with 13,000 acres had a value of \$38,000 – significantly greater than Orton (NCDAH, K.M. Murchison estate).

While Knott and her colleagues mention Murchison’s improvements at Orton (Knott et al. 2014:51), the photographs from this period show the main house with a sparse lawn and a few struggling plants (Figure 2). Although the photograph doesn’t suggest extensive



Figure 2. The Orton mansion looking northwest about 1890 (North Carolina Department of Archives and History, N_53_15_1680).

son, Wade Hampton Smith, identified in the census as a salesman, was reported to be “in charge of extensive work being done by Col. K.M. Murchison” at Orton (*Evening Dispatch*, Wilmington, NC, March 17, 1903).

landscape improvement, earlier photos show the Orton yard as entirely sand with no grass or plantings (although there were several plants along the south façade).

The Nursery Industry

In 1909 Soule remarked that “the nursery industry in the South is of recent origin” (Soule 1909:134). At the turn of the century there were only 158 nurseries in the South Atlantic states, with most occurring in Virginia, Georgia, and Florida. In North Carolina there were only three professionals in the horticulture area of the North Carolina State University in 1920, sharing responsibilities of teaching, research, and

Murchison died on June 3, 1904. His will, dated October 10, 1903, was probated on June 9, 1904 (Brunswick County Record of Wills Bk. A, pg. 185). Murchison appointed his son, Kenneth M. Murchison, Jr. and two sons-in-law, James Sprunt (who married his daughter Luola) and Shirley Carter (who married his daughter Jessie) as executors. His will directed that his wife, Katherine Williams Murchison (who would not die until 1912 at the age of 75), be provided for in any way necessary, and that the estate otherwise be

extension service. At the end of World War II there were 89 horticulturalists.

The specialty of floriculture had an even more modest beginning. There were 16 flower growers in operation in 1890 with a combined

results were very widespread, affecting about eight out of every 10 men born in the 1920s.

Housing markets were dramatically affected. In 1944, new housing starts in the U.S. were at 142,000. Just two years later they hit one million (McKenna 2008). Of course, the economic growth involved other factors as well. For example, the automobile industry was partially responsible; the number of autos produced annually quadrupled between 1946 and 1955.

Regardless, all of these changes led the public out of the cities into the new suburbs, where they found large yards and abundant housing. Jackson commented that "affluent and middle-class Americans live in suburban areas that are far from their work places, in homes that they own, and in the center of yards

that by urban standards elsewhere are enormous (Jackson 1985:12).

greenhouse area of 28,000 square feet in North Carolina. The wholesale value of their crop in that year was \$111,000.

Newman and Hayden-Smith suggest the turn-of-the-century growth was at least partially the result of the introduction of parcel post, improved transportation, and legislation prohibiting the importation of certain plants after WWI (Newman and Hayden-Smith 2014:2).

The nursery business is driven by new home construction and new owners seeking to make the property their own, as well as healthy consumer spending. Figure 4 shows the growth of both nurseries and dealers in North Carolina between 1936 and 1967. The growth during the 1930s and 1940s is relatively flat, but dramatically

The most significant growth, however, occurred after WWII. The post-World War II surge in homeownership was nothing less than remarkable (Figure 3). The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill, was transformative in transitioning returning soldiers into citizenship. The bill granted eligible veterans free college tuition, job training and placement, generous unemployment benefits, and low interest no money down loans for home ownership. The

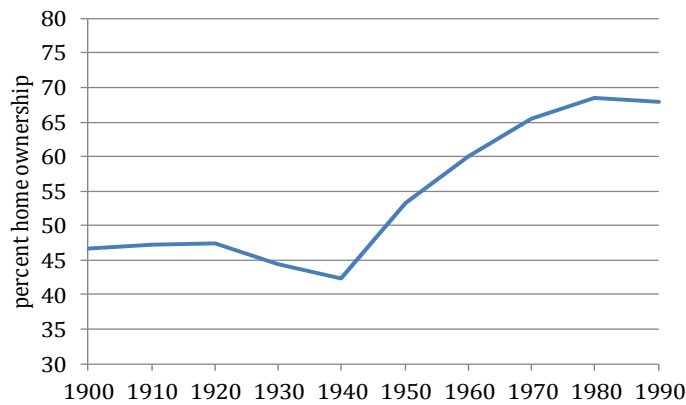


Figure 3. The post-WWII rise in home ownership.

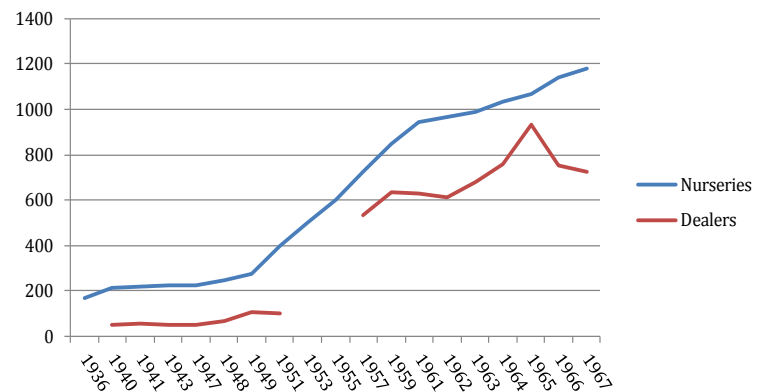


Figure 4. Growth of the nursery industry in North Carolina.

increasing after the end of World War II – with the increase in home ownership, a healthy economy, and a baby-boom that inspired “nesting.”

Success in the business, however, depends on a large capital investment, with the need to make substantial investments for several years before realizing any positive returns. One report indicates that that it may require 2 to 4 years of operation before any significant returns and an additional 3 to 5 years before a profit is assured (Anonymous 2014).

The Orton Nursery Records

When Orton Plantation Holding took control of the property at Orton one of the extant buildings, known as the Dinky House, was found to contain a variety of boxed papers and bound volumes. The papers were collected and stored until cleaning and processing for this study. The papers were heavily damaged by pests, primarily cockroaches and termites. The papers consisted primarily of very acidic yellow paper used for carbon copies, although invoices and other papers were mixed throughout.

It appears that at some point, probably as a result of the original filing system, papers were organized by year and alphabetically. There is, in fact, some evidence that Henry Churchill Bragaw maintained his files alphabetically in accordion binders. However, by the time the papers were collected from the house and stored temporarily in “zip lock” plastic bags, little remained of the original filing system.

The collection begins in 1937 with a very few items and effectively ends in 1943. There are significant gaps in the paperwork and the extent of loss to pests, discard, and other factors is unknown. It appears that Bragaw was fairly meticulous in his correspondence, although he modestly claimed otherwise. In the first few years there are virtually no invoices. As time goes on the quantity of invoices begins to outstrip correspondence. In addition, while the papers cover at least the first year of Jim Ferger’s management of the plantation and gardens,

almost no correspondence remains from this period. Whether Ferger was simply not as meticulous as Bragaw or if the files were stored elsewhere is unknown. Similarly, why there is no correspondence or invoices after 1948 is also unknown. Certainly such items existed at some point.

Future research may uncover additional business records. Items of particular concern that should be sought include the vast amount of Kodachrome slides and movie film that were created by Bragaw during this tenure at Orton. The fate of these materials is unknown.

Similarly, while catalogs were produced by Orton at least as early as 1938, nothing has found earlier than 1946-1947. Thus there is a decade of catalogs that would document the earliest development and sales at the Orton Nursery which have disappeared.

In spite of what isn’t present, the materials in this collection – accounting for about 5 linear feet – provide an exceptional view of Orton’s transition and evolution.

James Sprunt and the Beginning of the Orton Gardens

The Sprunt family rose to prominence in the late nineteenth century as the owners of what for a brief period was the largest cotton exporting house in the United States (Killick 1981:145). Alexander Sprunt and Son reached its peak about 1914, held their position during the 1920s, but began a decline that corresponded with the wane of cotton in the United States. Killick provides profit and losses for selected years, revealing that in total the firm made a profit of \$3,270,763 and posted a loss of \$1,062,548. Significant losses began at the Great Depression and continued into the late 1940s. Killick comments that “some of the Sprunts’ ablest offspring chose other careers, and those that were left were either too speculative with the business or too cautious” (Killick 1981:165).

Luola Murchison married James Sprunt in 1883 at the Murchison house in New York (*Morning Star*, Wilmington, NC, December 2, 1883). They had three children, Kate, James Laurence (sometimes spelled Lawrence), and Marion, but only James Laurence survived to adulthood.

In September 1909 Luola Sprunt purchased Orton by paying each of the other heirs to the property (Jennia [Jane] Ellis, Jessie Carter, Kenneth Murchison, Jr., and Marion Hurhamp) \$5,000.¹ The purchase price equaled the

appraised value of the property and the division occurred without the necessity of a court case. The deed, however, stipulated that should Luola sell the property within 10 years, the profits would be split between all of the children. If the property wasn’t sold the deed specified that the property would descend to James Laurence Sprunt. If he should die without issue, then the land would then be split among the heirs (Brunswick County Register of Deeds, DB 12, pg. 383).

Knott and her colleagues (2014:52) cite a letter from James Sprunt to Theophilus Parsons of Boston dated March 22, 1909 explaining that they were “making great improvements at Orton” which suggests financial investments were beginning even prior to the property being acquired by Luola Sprunt.

James and Luola Sprunt never lived at Orton, being enumerated by the 1910 and 1920 census at their home in Wilmington. One of the earliest accounts we have of the plantation helps reinforce its new role. James Laurence, home from Princeton, held a “most enjoyable week-end house party” at Orton (“Delightful House Party,” *Evening Dispatch*, Wilmington, NC, December 23, 1907).

Major additions were made to the Orton house in 1910. The architect for this work was Kenneth

¹ A family myth has grown up that Orton was purchased by Luola’s husband James:

Orton was purchased from the estate of Colonel Murchison, who died in 1904, by a son-in-law, the late James Sprung LLD, and presented to Mrs.

Sprunt (Sprunt 1958:17).

The reason for such a fundamental historical error is unclear, but it has been so widely repeated that it has become ingrained in Wilmington “history.” If there was any doubt that Luola purchased Orton Plantation, her will makes it clear that the property remained in her name (Brunswick County Will Books, WB B, pg. 366).



Figure 5. Orton Plantation in ca. 1910 and 1911. The top photo shows the house before the work by architect Kenneth Murchison, Jr. about 1911 and the photo below shows the house and grounds afterwards, about 1912 (adapted from Murchison 1911).

Murchison, Jr., the brother of Luola. Kenneth Murchison designed a number of train stations, several hotels and clubs, and several apartments with most of his work in New York or the northeast. One historian commented that Murchison was an architect “better known in his own day than he is now, for he failed to develop a signature style” (Mohr 2008:9). Most of his work was in the Beaux Art and Classical Revival styles.

grassed, and a formal stepped entrance from the terraced yard to the Orton house. While plans exist for the architectural improvements, no landscape plans have been identified. Some confirmation of this supposition is provided by James Laurence Sprunt, who claims that the gardens were begun in 1910 (Sprunt 1958). Figure 6 shows some of the landscape work around the house.



Figure 6. Early landscaping around the Orton House, ca. 1911 (NCDAH N_78_7_68).

By 1911 the work must have been largely completed, since a series of photographs and ground floor plans were published (Murchison 1911:200-204).² These photographs give us our first carefully dated view of the landscape modifications at Orton (Figure 5). The earlier photo shows what appear to be lining out plants forming walkway and bed borders.³ After the work it appears that larger plants have been used, the area

An article written by Kenneth Murchison Sprunt in 1952 provides our only detailed account of this early work, although the activities he writes about took place prior to his birth,

In the early 1900's, Mrs. James Sprunt laid the foundation for the present gardens. Under her direction were constructed extensive terraces overlooking the rice fields, and many specimens and other ornamental plant materials popular at the time were set out. It was during this period that the first camellias were brought to Orton. It is thought that they were purchased from Berekmans' Nursery – now Fruitland Nurseries – at Augusta, Georgia. Among

them were Anna Zucchini (Lilyi), Bella Romana, Orton Pink (Dixie), Henri Favre, and a variety afterwards named Annie Gray. The largest of these original plants is the Anna Zucchini, which is at present twenty-four feet in height and eighteen feet through; the trunk at the ground is forty-six inches in circumference (Sprunt 1952:75).

Water appears to have been a concern of Sprunt since in 1910 he paid \$30.59 on the freight to ship a water tower to Orton. This tower appears on coastal charts by 1924 when it was located

² There are a number of payments that suggest the work at the Orton mansion extended past 1910-1911 (Trinkley and Hacker 2012:99-100).

³ Lining out plants or “liners” are small plants that can be planted and allowed to grow out. They are inexpensively priced and often the result of finished seedlings.

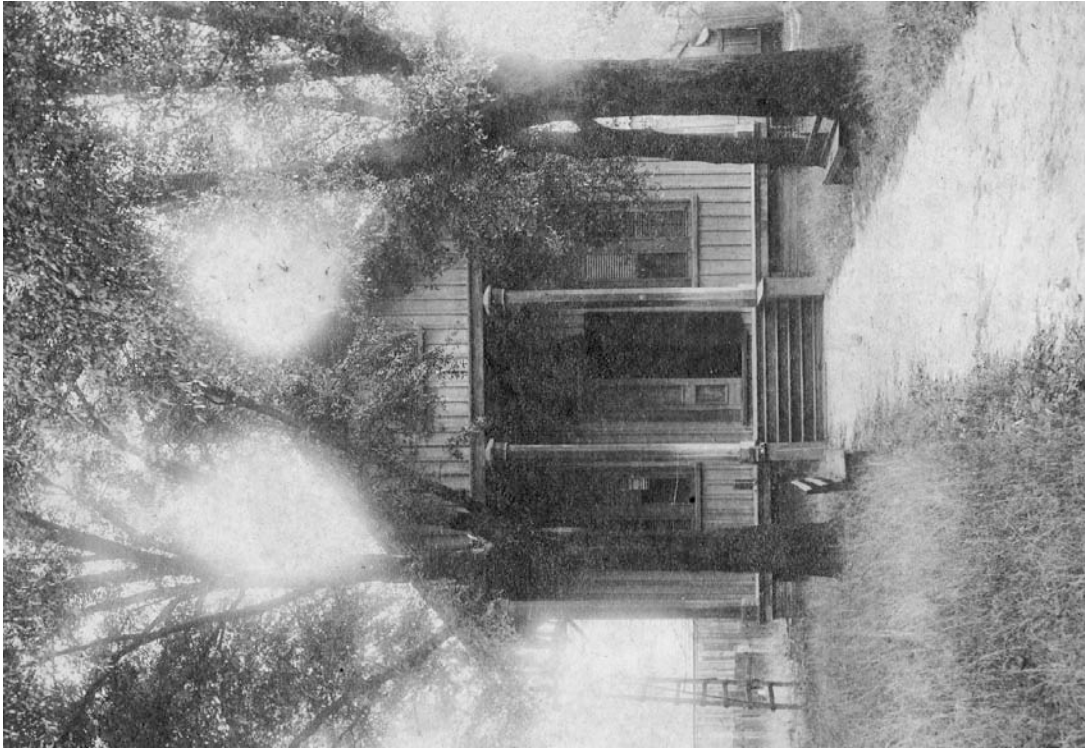
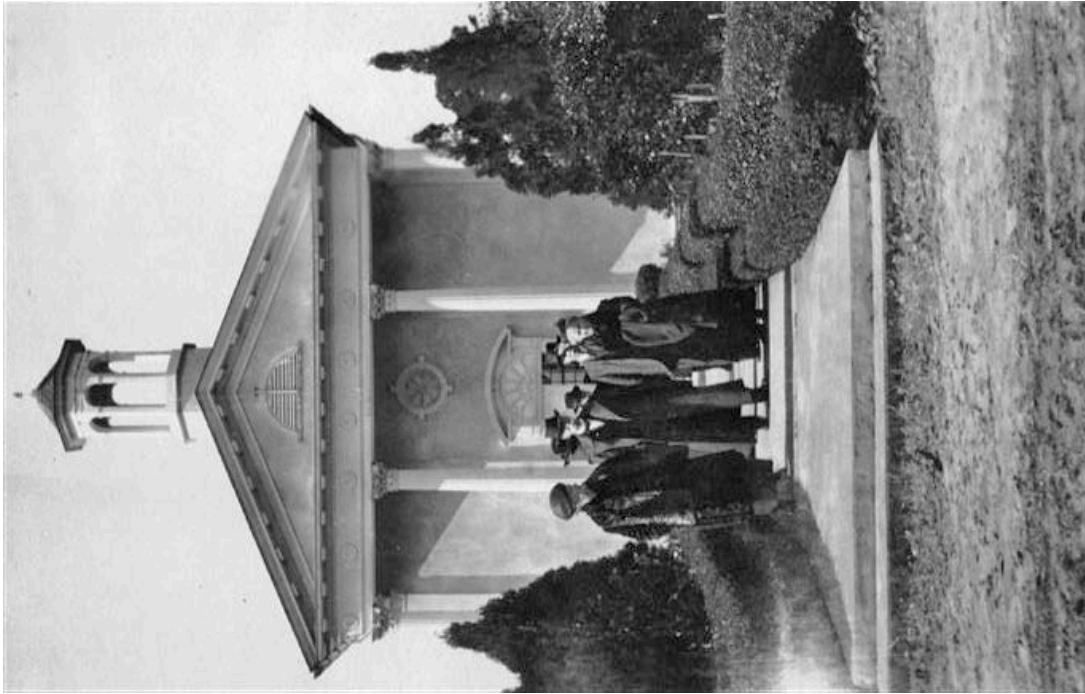


Figure 7. Chapels on Orton. On the left is Luola's Chapel, probably shown shortly after its construction. On the right is possibly the 1916 African American chapel.

northwest of Luola's Chapel. That same year two Orton cisterns were repaired and in 1914 they were cleaned.

In 1912 James Laurence Sprunt married Amoret Cameron Price. Unfortunately, she died shortly after giving birth to a son, James Laurence Sprunt, Jr., in 1915.

The following year, on February 17, 1916, Luola Sprunt died in Wilmington after a long illness (Wilson 1917). A memorial publication mentioned her love of Orton and went on to explain:

she builded [sic] near the dwelling-house a beautiful chapel of pure colonial design by her brother, an eminent New York architect, for the use of our guests and for the neighborhood white people, for there was no other church for miles around. It seats 100 persons and it is not yet dedicated, but it will ever be known as "Luola's Chapel."

Her last gift was another beautiful church for the colored people of Orton and their friends, which seats 110 persons (Wilson 1916:22; Figure 7).

Also by 1916 James Laurence Sprunt was more active on Orton, planning and hosting a tour of the property for Brunswick County teachers. He provided them access to "the Chapel" (probably Luola's Chapel), other buildings, and of course the Orton house and its "various historical

treasures" ("Brunswick Teachers Enjoy Visit to Orton Plantation," *Morning Star*, Wilmington, NC, August 18, 1916).

By the next year a visitor to the plantation mentioned that a tram car pulled by a mule was still being used to transport visitors from the wharf to the main house – probably after extensive repairs of the old Murchison tracks by Sprunt.

While rice was no longer being grown, the Sprunt Personal Accounts reveal that peanuts were being planted at Orton at least by 1914 (see also Block 1998:56), although a far more common entry had to do with cutting timber off the plantation. Sprunt was also converting the rice fields to grow cotton and corn, the presumably new cash crops on the plantation ("Acres of Growing Cotton and Corn Were Inundated," *Wilmington Dispatch*, Wilmington, NC, August 11, 1917). By 1922 the peanut crop was sold for \$48, while a pea crop sold for \$23.96. By 1917 potatoes and corn can be documented and by 1918 turnips

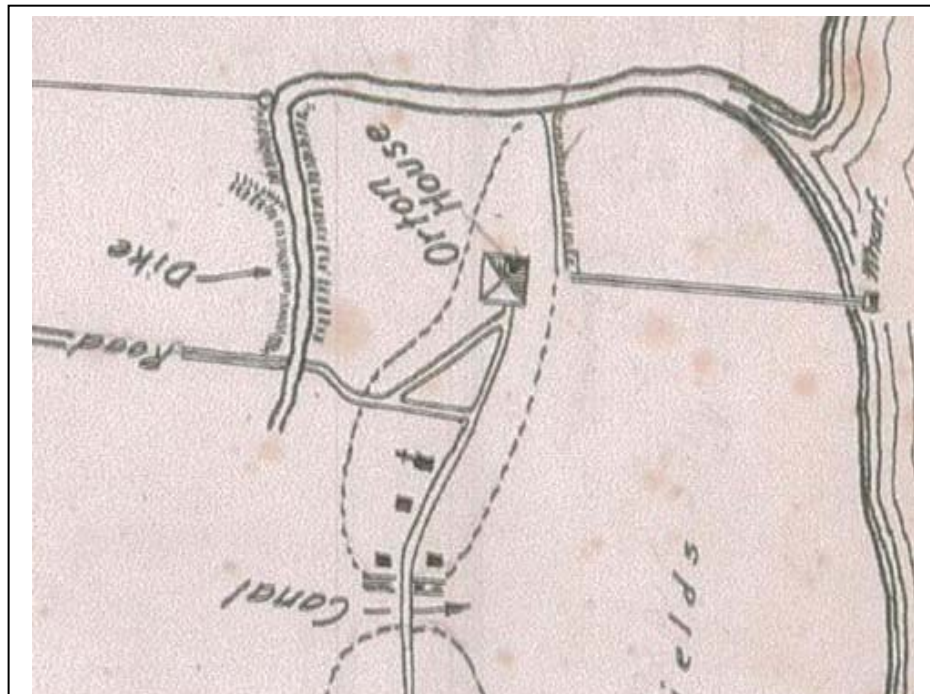


Figure 8. 1921 survey of Orton Plantation by Humphreys (north is to the top of the plan).

is partially ameliorated by a 1924 U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey map which shows the water tower, as well as the African American church (Figure 9).

Work on the beautification of Orton had begun by at least 1923 when we find listings in the account books for the purchase of fruit trees (\$25.12), the freight on bulbs (\$164.40), and the cost of bulbs (\$111.48) (Sprunt Personal Accounts). In an interview, Kenneth M. Sprunt believes that the early garden contained “some camellias, azaleas, and banana shrubs and one or two other plants that were indigenous to the area” (Bissette 1995:5).

On July 9, 1924, James Sprunt died in Wilmington of pneumonia at the age of 78 (North Carolina Death Certificate). Sprunt’s estate included “about one million dollars” along with Orton and Kendal, as well as a house and lot in Wrightsville Beach and the Wilmington property (New Hanover County Will Book L, pg. 400). With his death, James Laurence Sprunt became the next life estate owner of the property.

James Laurence Sprunt and the Orton Gardens and Nursery

Going into the 1930s the Sprunt account book includes fewer entries. There may have been a different book that has not survived or has not been found. Fortunately, the nursery and other plantation records found in the Orton caretaker's house once the property was purchased by Orton Plantation Holding helps fill in many of the blanks.

As previously discussed, genealogical research reveals that Annie Gray Nash brought one son into the marriage, Peter Browne Ruffin, while James Laurence Sprunt brought James Laurence, Jr. Together Laurence and Annie Gray Sprunt had three sons of their own: Kenneth Murchison, Samuel Nash, and Laurence Gray.

By 1936, after James Sprunt's death in 1924, his son James Laurence Sprunt paid a bill to the IRS in the amount of \$30,448.19, with an additional \$15,467.12 in interest and penalties (Sprunt Personal Accounts). It is likely that this strained activities at Orton.

Nevertheless, we can document that rice was harvested in 1922 and that rice was planted again in 1923, 1924, and 1925. In 1929 freight on a rice threshing machine was paid by Sprunt, suggesting that rice was still being grown. In 1930 rice straw was sold, documenting that rice was still a commodity at Orton. A May 1934 entry to the American Express Company for \$81.48 appears to be a shipping charge for the last of the rice on the plantation. This indicates that production ceased between 1933 and 1934.

In 1930 John E. Batchelor was listed in the federal census as the Superintendent of Orton

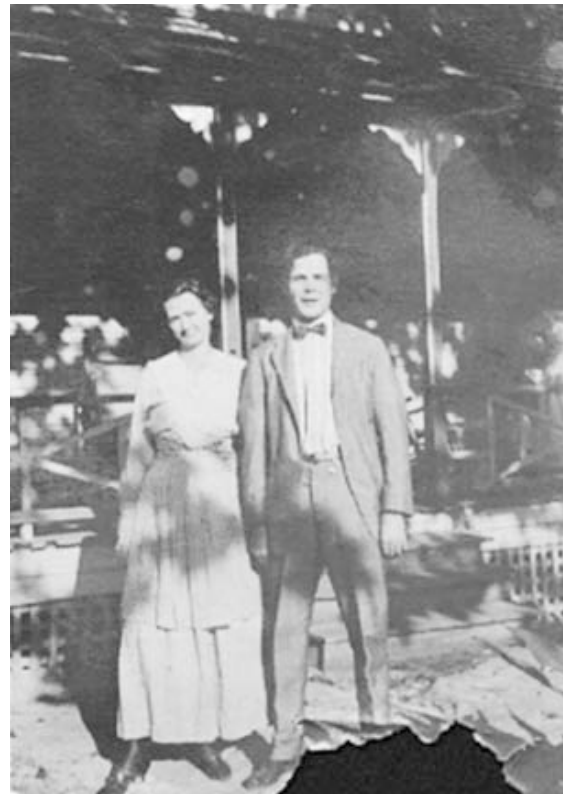


Figure 10. Eva and John Batchelor (courtesy <http://trees.ancestry.com/tree/10646176/person/-603972743/photo/929af639-7556-451d-8782-66fe0c9ff95e?src=search>).

Plantation. Oral histories identify his wife, Eva, as also working at Orton.¹ Working as the Foreman of

¹ Batchelor was born in 1882 and died in 1952. In 1920 he listed his occupation as a mechanic in Onslow County. By 1940 he was in Lee County as the owner of a farm. At his death he was in New Hanover working as a carpenter. Thus, his tenure at Orton seems to have been

the plantation was John E. Pearson, also listed in the 1930 census.

One of the earliest news accounts of the gardens opening to the public reveals that Mrs. Laurence Sprunt allowed the Brunswick County Hospital auxiliary to open the gardens to the public, asking them to “charge a small admission price and donate it to the hospital.” The article went on to explain that this was “in keeping with a custom created by Mr. and Mrs. Sprunt several years ago” (“Orton Opening to Aid Hospital,” *Morning Star*, Wilmington, NC, April 7, 1936).

By 1938 the newspaper reported that Orton would be open to the public indefinitely since “so many people made the trip to Orton and were disappointed to find it closed” (“Orton Plantation Open Indefinitely,” *Wilmington Star*, June 2, 1938). The article reported that as usual, the entrance fee would go to charity. By at least 1940 gate receipts were no longer devoted to charity, but were considered profits.

Sturtevant and His Plans

Knott and her colleagues suggest that the second major garden design initiative began about 1934-1935 using the services of Robert Swan Sturtevant. They identify Sturtevant as a Harvard-educated landscape architect who had served as director of the Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture in Groton, Massachusetts (Knott et al. 2014:54).² Sturtevant is perhaps best remembered for his extensive work with irises (he was the first secretary of the American Iris Society), although he published on garden design (*Beneath the Surface of Garden Design*), ground covers and

relatively short.

² Located in Groton, MA, the Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture, Gardening and Horticulture for Women opened in 1901 under the direction of Judith Eleanor Low (Mrs. Edward Gilchrist Low). The first school of its kind for women, Lowthorpe was incorporated in 1909 and changed its name to the Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture in 1929. The School merged with Rhode Island School of Design in 1945, becoming a Department within the Division of Planning.

garden flowers.

There is some question regarding the plans since only one of the two sheets is dated. One plan sheet, entitled “Orton Plantation on the West Bank of the Cape Fear River About 15 Miles Below Wilmington, North Carolina,” is dated January 1937 and was prepared when Sturtevant was still in Groton, Massachusetts. Reproduced here as Figure 11, we believe it may represent the plantation prior to any of Sturtevant’s activities. For example, it identifies a Green Yard, suggesting that some plants were being propagated for use on the plantation, but fails to identify a “nursery.” It also fails to show many of the garden features that were almost certainly added by Sturtevant.

This plan shows the African American church situated on the north side of Cow Bridge Branch, probably on the wooded slope into the drainage. Also shown is a tennis court, southeast of the main house. A caretaker’s house is also shown, which was likely the residence of Orton superintendents.

The second plan is entitled, “The Gardens at Orton” and seems to post-date the first based on additions, including the presence of parking and a developed nursery area. Knott and her colleagues seem to concur, dating this plan sheet about 1937-1938. It is reproduced here as Figure 12.

In addition to these plans there are two documents in the Orton Nursery Collections related to the Sturtevant work. The first document, typewritten, is entitled, “Notes for Orton Plantation, Wilmington, N.C.” References within the text reveal that it was written based on notes taken in November 1936. Handwritten, in brown ink is the notation, “1938 in Brown.” This suggests that this document may be the first of the two batches, since it appears to predate the handwritten additions.

The second document included three separate typewritten sheets, each with a different title. One is, “Approximate Planting Locations of stock received De[c]. 1938.” Another is entitled,

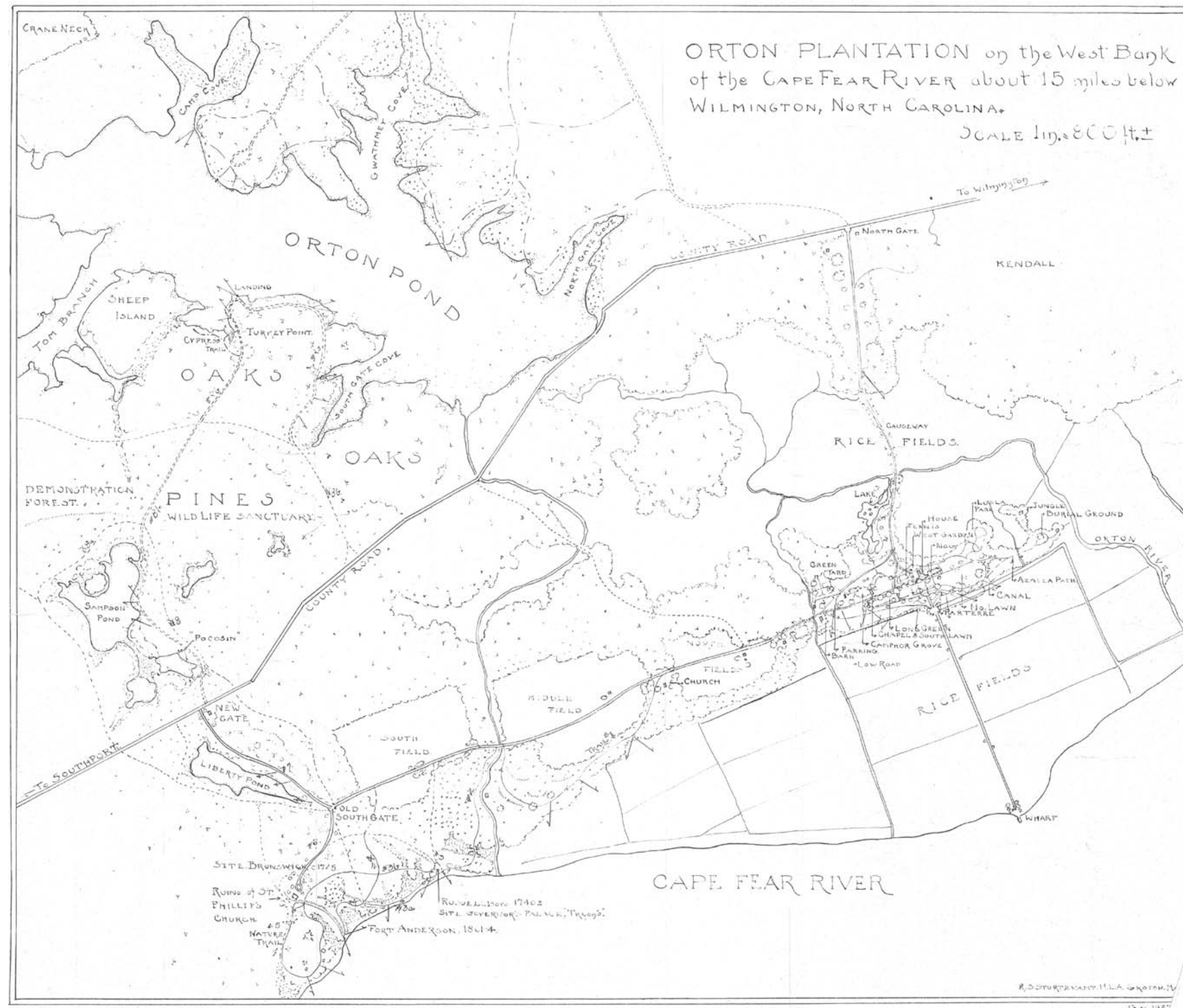


Figure 11. Sturtevant's 1937 "Orton Plantation on the West Bank of the Cape Fear River About 15 Miles Below Wilmington, North Carolina."

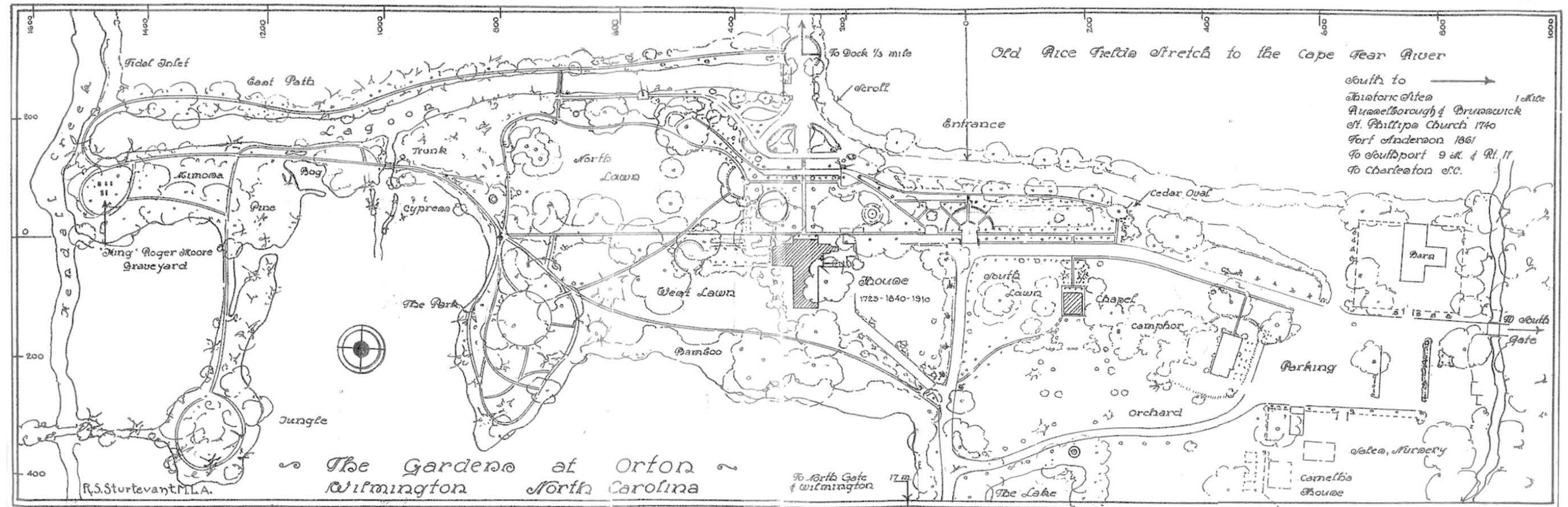


Figure 12. Sturtevant's "The Gardens at Orton, Wilmington, North Carolina," possibly dating to about 1938.

"Unfinished Business – Lagoon – Dec 1938" and the third is, "Orton – General Notes Dec. 1938."

The first document discusses treatments in a variety of areas, including the north gate, causeway, the parking area, house and gardens (including the terrace walk, the parterre, and the lawn, Luola Park, the [Roger Moore] burial ground, the north Presbyterian walk, the drive to the dock, areas south of the house (including the south Presbyterian walk, the long green, the low road, tennis area, south lawn, the lake, and the parking area), and the Green Yard.

The Green Yard discussions are of special interest. Sturtevant recommended that "non-selling spirea, arborvitae, etc." be cleared out or killed. Tubs and pots were to be arranged in "neat rows for light and air" and frames were to be developed for small stock. He recommended against carrying "Chinese hollies etc." suggesting they "might better be planted out and allowed to die of neglect."

Finally, Sturtevant noted, "even with visitors wanting plants I doubt if you will ever wish to supply anything except camellias and azaleas, possibly not even those." Nevertheless, Sturtevant seems to have been conflicted, since in one field, apparently west of the chapel, toward the lake, Sturtevant recommended planting camellias at 10 to 15 foot spacing "for future sale as specimens." Yet elsewhere in the report he explains that the Camellia collection is well begun, azaleas are possible and also, in small groups experimental plantings from various parts of the country. There were "endless possibilities if they are worth the trouble."

This indicates that no formal nursery yet existed in 1936-1938, although a few plants might have been sold. The image that emerges is a "green yard" devoted almost exclusively to the planting needs of Orton, although plants might have been ordered without regard to those planting needs, resulting in surpluses that were offered for sale.

Throughout the document Sturtevant was

careful to encourage "pruning to encourage vistas" and suggesting that "the open view under oaks out over rice fields should be preserved." He also encouraged, "variety of light and shade, of outlook and enclosure, of plants in foliage or in bloom add interest to any series of walks and gardens." Color was equally important and he recommended, "red-buds and dogwoods, red maple, even sumach [sic], freely to cut-over area at edge of woods . . . for spring and fall color while a couple of small groups of mimosa will give summer interest."

In the garden around the house he proposed "beds edged with azaleas (the Hino-digiri clipt); specimen camellias, etc. Eventually there will be areas of spring bulbs or summer annuals thru the beds."

Around houses he suggested "English ivy, red cedar, mimosa, China Berry, Crape myrtle, discarded camellias, pear or peach, roses, and wisteria," while near walks and drives he recommended fruit trees. For fragrance he proposed "Locust and Sweet Bay in quantity. Banana Shrubs, Tea Olive and other Osmanthus, Meratia, daphnes, Eleagnus pungens, Loquats well scattered about the garden." He was also opinionated, wanting to eliminate the arborvitae and calling the existing Japanese quinces "just shabby." Table 1 provides a list of plants specified by Sturtevant. One of the first observations is that his vision was not focused on azaleas and camellias; rather he was proposing a vast range of plants, including shrubs, bulbs, and evergreens to create texture, a variety of seasonal colors, spectacular view sheds, and fragrances throughout the gardens.

In fact, what would become the hallmark of Orton – its camellias and azaleas – were very restrained. For example, Sturtevant recommended only an "occasional azalea" would be planted on the islands visible from the causeway. In the gardens, he proposed "beds edged with azaleas (the Hino-digiri clipt); specimen camellias, etc. . . . azaleas or too tall camellias must always be cut back in this area to hold views or to give specimen camellias freedom . . . an azalea path leading thru

Table 1.
Plants Listed by Sturtevant for Orton

Common Name Used by Sturtevant	Scientific Name	Notes
althaea	<i>Hibiscus syriacus</i>	also known as Rose of Sharon
aucubas	<i>Aucuba</i> spp.	
banana shrub	<i>Michelia figo</i>	
bear grass	<i>Xerophyllum tenax</i>	
buddleia	<i>Buddleia</i> spp.	butterfly bush
Calluna var compacta	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Scotch heather
camellia	<i>Camellia</i> spp.	
camphor trees	<i>Cinnamomum camphora</i>	
cane grass	Poaceae	probably <i>Eragrostis infecunda</i> or southern canegrass
cane or bamboo	Bambusoideae	
cassine holly	<i>Ilex cassine</i>	
Cedrus	<i>Cedrus</i> spp.	cedar
Cephalotaxus erect	<i>Cephalotaxus</i> spp.	plum yew
Chamaerops	<i>Chamaerops humilis</i>	fan palms
cherries	<i>Prunus</i> spp.	possibly <i>Prunus avium</i>
cherry laurels	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>	
China berry	<i>Melia azedarach</i>	
Chinese hollies	<i>Ilex cornuta</i>	
chrysanthemum	<i>Chrysanthemum</i> spp.	also <i>Dendranthema</i> spp.; also <i>Chrysanthemum indicum</i>
Confederate jasmine	<i>Trachelospermum jasminoides</i>	
crape myrtle	<i>Lagerstroemia</i> spp.	
Cycrorevoluta	<i>Cycas revoluta</i>	known as sago palm
cypress	Cupressaceae	possibly <i>Cupressus sempervirens</i> , the Mediterranean cypress; may also have been a <i>Taxodium</i> spp.
daffodil, narcissus	<i>Narcissus</i> spp.	
daphne	<i>Daphne</i> spp.	
Dasyliirion	<i>Dasyliirion</i> spp.	variety of yucca-like plants
dogwood	<i>Cornus</i> spp.	
Elaeagnus pungens	<i>Elaeagnus pungens</i>	thorny olive or silverthorn
elegans	<i>Camellia japonica</i>	
Egyptian lotus	<i>Nymphaea</i> spp.	Egyptian water lilly
ferns		monilophytes
formosa	<i>Albizia julibrissin</i>	presumably the same as mimosa
forsythia	<i>Forsythia</i> spp.	
fuchsias	<i>Fuchsia</i> spp.	
gardenia radicans	<i>Gardenia jasminoides</i> 'Radicans'	miniature gardenia
gardinia	<i>Gardenia</i> spp.	
hindo-digiri azalea	<i>Rhododendron obtusum</i>	also hindi-digiri; includes Hiryu azalea, Kurume azalea
holly	<i>Ilex</i> spp.	
honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera</i> spp.	
Ilex myrtifolia	<i>Ilex myrtifolia</i>	myrtle holly
iris	<i>Iris</i> spp.	
Japanese maple	<i>Acer palmatum</i>	
Japanese privit	<i>Ligustrum japonicum</i>	
Japanese azalea	<i>Rhododendron</i> spp.	evergreen azalea
jasmine	<i>Gelsmium sempervirens</i>	probably Carolina jessamine
ligustrum	<i>Ligustrum</i> spp.	privet
lilly	<i>Lilium</i> spp.	
liriope	<i>Liriope</i> spp.	lilyturf
live oaks	<i>Quercus virginiana</i>	
locust	<i>Gleditsia triacanthos</i>	honey locust
loquat	<i>Eriobotrya japonica</i>	
Mahonia beali	<i>Mahonia beali</i>	also known as leatherleaf mahonia
mallow	Malvaceae	genus uncertain from context
meranti	<i>Shorea leprosula</i>	
mimosa	<i>Albizia julibrissin</i>	
mountain laurel	<i>Kalmia latifolia</i>	
myrtifolia	<i>Polygala myrtifolia</i>	myrtle-leaf milkwort
nandina	<i>Nandina domestica</i>	also known as heavenly bamboo
Othiopogon japonica	<i>Ophiopogon japonicus</i>	dwarf lilyturf
osmanthus	<i>Osmanthus fragrans</i>	also known as tea olive, sweet olive, fragrant olive
palmetto	<i>Sabal palmetto</i>	cabbage palmetto
pampas grass	<i>Cortaderia selloana</i>	
Parkinsonia chilopsis	uncertain	possibly Parkinsonia tree, Parinsonia aculeata
peach	<i>Prunus persica</i>	flowering peach
pear	<i>Pyrus</i> spp.	both flowering and fruit bearing varieties
petunia	<i>Petunia</i> spp.	
podocarpus	<i>Podocarpus</i> spp.	probably <i>Podocarpus macrophyllus</i> or yew
privet	<i>Ligustrum</i> spp.	
pyracantha	<i>Pyracantha</i> spp.	also known as firethorn
Pyrus angustifolia	<i>Malus angustifolia</i>	Southern crab apple
red maple	<i>Acer rubrum</i>	
red-buds	<i>Cercis canadensis</i>	
Rhododendron	<i>Rhododendron</i> spp.	possibly azalea
roses	<i>Rosa</i> spp.	
rye grass	<i>Lolium</i> spp.	
saw-toothed palm	<i>Serenoa repens</i>	also saw palmetto
scillas	<i>Scilla</i> spp.	also known as squill
smilax	<i>Smilax</i> spp.	
sour gum	<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	also tupelo, black tupelo
spirea	<i>Spiraea</i> spp.	also known as bridal wreath
sumac	<i>Rhus</i> spp.	
sweet bay	<i>Laurus nobilis</i>	
sweet gum	<i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>	
trumpet creeper	<i>Campsis radicans</i>	
tuberous begonias	<i>Begonia x tuberhybrida</i>	
tulip	<i>Tulipa</i> spp.	
vinca minor	<i>Vinca minor</i>	lesser periwinkle, dwarf periwinkle
virginia creeper	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	
water lily	Nymphaeaceae	
weeping willow	<i>Salix babylonica</i>	
wild grape	<i>Vitis rotundifolia</i>	probably muscadine
wisteria	<i>Wisteria</i> spp.	
yaupon holly	<i>Ilex vomitoria</i>	
yew	<i>Taxus baccata</i>	English or European yew
zinnia	<i>Zinnia</i> spp.	

the tangle to the Old Burial Ground. . . . [and] No azaleas or camellias to detract from the parterre."

In one document he recommends "buy not over 10 each not large plants," suggesting that he intended the plants to grow into the garden landscape, not create a ready-made landscape.

Plants were frequently used as screening. He recommended "add firethorn and Nandina to screen [the tennis court] from the drive to south." Similar screening was recommended at the barn.

Sturtevant also tackled the hardscape, recommending that the entrance road be regraded to a full 20-feet (other roads were to be expanded to 22 feet) in width with the crest lowered "to correct the present crown being conspicuous." He also recommended that signs were of critical importance and suggested "comfort stations" as well as "benches in many places." Sturtevant also recommended the construction of a new "Green Cottage" to be used as an "office and bunk room for winter week ends [sic]." His paths were to be "pleasantly curved, comfortably firm." They were often specified as being lined with brick.

In the second document it seems that Sturtevant formalized his plans, providing far more specific details for individual aspects. For example, of the 20 wisteria plants, he directed that one be planted at the west end of the bridge, two on the east path "maybe 3," one on the pine at the west side. Three were to be placed beyond the trunk and to the east of the path to the cemetery, near the water. For the 10 mountain laurel, he wanted five along the lagoon, and five west of the north garden and kitchen. The palmetto and bear grass Sturtevant were to be planted "freely" along the causeway. In addition, he directed that an 18-inch high cypress long rail be constructed "where trees do not give [a] feeling of security." Eight weeping willows were to be planted on the causeway.

This second document also mentions the doll house, although it appears to still be located behind the main house.

Besides the plans and written documents there are a few surviving letters between Sturtevant and both Sprunt and Bragaw. For example, in an undated letter Sturtevant wrote Bragaw, noting that he had received, "a batch of nice letters from Laurence who sounds tickled with progress" and providing recommendations for the urns in the front of the Orton mansion. However, Sturtevant also remarked that his own business was going from "fair to poor largely due to the big increase in cost of materials and labor" suggesting that Orton might have been one of his larger clients (letter from Robert Sturtevant to Bragaw, undated ca. October 1940).

Also about this time Bragaw received – but did not cash – a \$100 check from Sturtevant's wife, Margaret. The enclosed letter, by Robert explained, "I sincerely hope that you will use the enclosed – it is not a matter of paying you for your hospitality by any means it is really asking further favors and consideration" (letter from Robert Sturtevant to Bragaw, October 1940). He went on to explain that the check was "but a little part of what I should like to put into the piece [of property] just South of your IF it does not upset your own plans." Clearly Sturtevant sought to purchase some property near Orton and Bragaw.

In addition to the discussions about some property, Sturtevant also explained that he understood Laurence Sprunt "expected to make you [Bragaw] some payment for extra hospitality" but that if that did not happen, "I really think you are a good enough friend to say so and to let me pay what amounts to at least the cost of provisions."

A dated letter thanks Bragaw for the "most magnificent two weeks of being treated like Royalty" and explaining that his sons were sending "a box of King Edwards to be presented to Herman + his friends" (letter from Robert Sturtevant, Nashville, Tennessee to Bragaw, dated October 29, 1940).

In response, Bragaw wrote,

we have been able to cross

several items from that formidable list of 'things to do' which you left upon the completion of your last bottle of rum at Orton. Bob Godfred, or being the lesser of the two Bobs, we call him Boblet, has been as meek as a mice since his reprimand concerning the Lagerstoemia. He has been working very hard, staying sober, and pruning but properly. Under his expert supervision the Scroll Garden has had an excellent manicuring, and the garden in general looks very neat, except for a few gosh-awful plants which you, a frugal New Englander, stuck hither and yon to save their lives (or shall we say to give them a slower death). We have had the road fixed as specified, excepting the fact that it looked so well to Mr. Sprunt – nice and wide from the sun dial to the chapel – that it is now thusly all the way to the two urns, and minus the walk from the latter to the chapel.

Both areas to the sides of the road have been planted in grass so that the urns look a little as though they were hanging in mid air. Would it, therefore, be agreeable to your aesthetic senses to make small anchorage plantings from the base of the urns southward toward the barn for a few feet in order to make them look a bit more at home, and also to give the very definite idea that one is in the garden from this point onward.

. . . . The Boblet is taking this letter via pencil and paper so that there will probably be some between-the-lines writing. . . . tell the latter [the two little s.'s] that

all the darkies greatly appreciated the cigars which were sent them (letter to Robert Sturtevant, Nashville, Tennessee from Bragaw, dated November 19, 1940).

Sprunt and His Plans

Sturtevant's plans provide an exceptionally clear view of his plans for the Orton garden. What, however, was the goal of James Laurence Sprunt? Clearly by 1936 something sufficient was developed at Orton to encourage public viewing. Was that all that Sprunt sought?

Kenneth Murchison Sprunt explains that,

From 1916 to 1980 the gardens as such underwent no major changes – except for the fact that many plants outgrew their ornamental value. In the early 1940's the present owner, J. Laurence Sprunt, began extending the gardens. At that time he attempted to purchase every named variety of camellia that was available in commercial nurseries. As there was so little known at that time, his efforts were rewarded by surprisingly few distinct varieties-compared to the hundreds listed today. There were also purchased many large specimens from near-by; none of these were outstanding varieties, but their size and fine appearance were impressive. These along with many azaleas and other ornamentals were planted in the gardens. Since the mid-1930's, the landscaping has been under the direction of a professional landscape architect [Sturtevant] (Sprunt 1952:76).

In fact, James Laurence Sprunt was attempting to educate himself concerning

camellias. Robert Rubel from Longview Nursery in Crichton, Alabama combines information with camellia nomenclature with typical posturing in a 1937 letter,

The authority for the horticultural variety name of Anna Zucchini, my Lot 14, will be found in Verschaffelt monograph. This particular variety of Camellia may be sold under local names by different nurserymen . . . adds to the confusion.

The true Sarah Frost is an outstanding variety. Unfortunately, there are several other inferior varieties of Camellias sold under the name of Sarah Frost. The yellowish cast to your foliage may indicate that your soil is either slightly toxic, or it lacks one of the minor elements of phosphate or magnesium. . . .

Alba plenas plants are just about as difficult to keep as any variety I am growing. The yankee florists always buy me out long before the season opens, taking all the budded plants I am willing to sell.

You mentioned having a sport from the Duke d'Orleans. The true Duke d'Orleans . . . is a decided red flower, yet most of the plants sold under this name are white peony flowers, with red stripes.

The Cheerfield as sold out in California has stamens and is said . . . to be a very inferior Camellia compared with my Lot 10, which we sell under the name of Cheerful.

You also asked if I know of any

other handsome varieties of Camellias blooming at the same time as Alba plena. Fimbriata Alba blooms at the same time . . . quite a number of other peony type pinks and reds that bloom at the same time.

Bear this in mind, Mr. Sprunt, when anyone tells you the name of a Camellia, always ask who is the authority for that name and where they secured authority for the name. After all, very few Camellias are sold under the correct horticultural variety name and as several nurserymen have told me, it makes little difference what you call them, so long as the name helps to sell the plants (letter from Robert O. Rubel, Jr., Longview Nursery, Crichton, Alabama to J. Lawrence Sprunt, Wilmington, dated November 15, 1937).

By the following year it appears that Sprunt had a clear vision for Orton,

We are commercializing Orton Plantation Garden this year on a large scale and the sight of the azaleas there is the best advertisement for the sale of the plant (letter from James Laurence Sprunt to Miss Mary F. Patterson, Laurinburg Floral Shop, Laurinburg, North Carolina, dated November 5, 1938).

The tenor of correspondence suggests that Sprunt was realizing that Orton would never support itself through what were at that time conventional means. He sought a different approach to make the plantation self sufficient and provide an income for his children.

Sprunt Hires Bragaw

One of the first steps taken by Sprunt to

place Orton on a firm footing to success was the hiring of a trained forester and horticulturalist. Henry Churchill Bragaw, Jr. Bragaw was hired by Sprunt by at least February 1937 and quite likely several months previous.³

Churchill was the son of Colonel and Mrs. Henry Churchill Bragaw and was born on October 11, 1914 in Beaufort, North Carolina. His father

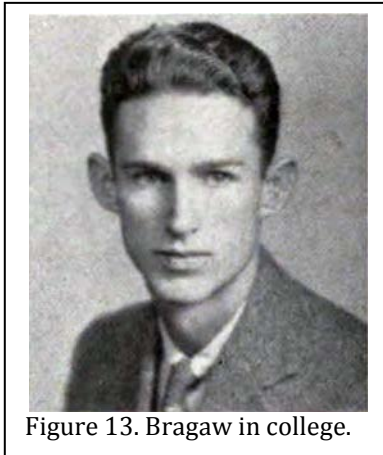


Figure 13. Bragaw in college.

was the owner of a farm, as well as the commander of the North Carolina State Militia for many years, but died in 1927. The children consisted of Margaret H. (b. 1904), Louise Gilliam (b.1913), Churchill, Helen Grist (b. 1914), and William (b. 1923).

He was one of the early members of the "Bug House Laboratory," later the Washington Field Museum, in Washington, North Carolina (Sterling and McLaurin 1987). He maintained a friendship and correspondence with Mary Shelburne, the museum's first director and curator. Mary visited Churchill at Orton on multiple occasions. In one letter she explains,

I had such a lively time this week-end, thanks to you. But you know I did, and it hardly seems

possible that it all happened + wasn't a dream. The happiest days I've ever spent in my life were with you at Orton. I've told you that before and it's absolutely true too. Why every time I go down it's better, and I'll never forget yesterday morning. Things like that seem too perfect, don't they as if they had never been or could be again. This morning I kept thinking about you down there + how beautiful it must have been. Because it was such a perfect fall morning and I wish I had been there (letter from Mary Shelburne to Churchill Bragaw, Orton, dated October 31, 1938).

Churchill attended North Carolina State University, majoring in Forestry and using student loans to pay his way through school. While in Raleigh he was selected for Alpha Zeta, served as the editor or business manager for several agricultural publications, and was a member of the "life saving corps." He was a member of the Golden Chain, an honor society comprised of 12 selected members of the junior class. He was identified as among the three best agriculture students in his class. He was also a R.O.T.C. member, resulting in his reserve officer status after graduation. In 1937 he was elected into the Scabbard and Blade, an honorary military organization at North Carolina State University ("Scabbard and Blade Extends Membership to Five ROTC Seniors," *Technician*, September 24, 1937, pg. 1).

As Churchill grew into his position at Orton he gradually assumed more duties, effectively becoming the manager of the property, including the forestry activities, the garden, the nursery, and agricultural production.

He became a noted photographer, shooting black and white, but especially Kodachrome slides. He also took – and showed publicly – the first movies made at Orton. This

3 This is based on Bragaw obtaining a permit from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Biological Survey on February 2, 1937 for work at Orton. Also his memorial in *The Chat* (March 1944) states that he took over management of Orton in 1937.

was nearly a decade prior to the making of the “Under Spring Skies” film by Tom Draper. Sadly, neither the stills nor motion pictures can be found.

Bragaw was also a well respected herpetologist and a member of the Carolina Bird Club. One of his earliest encounters with a snake occurred in 1922, when he was only seven years old. Playing in a tobacco barn he was bitten by a water moccasin or cottonmouth. Taken to the hospital “where a portion of the foot on which he had been bitten was cut out, nearly a quart of blood drawn and other remedies applied” (“Boy Bitten by Snake,” *The Kinston Free Press*, July 12, 1922, pg. 5). Never losing interest in writing, he was a member of the Outdoor Writers Association of America. In 1940 he joined the American Horticultural Society.

His love of snakes – as well as his good humor – is clearly shown in this exchange between colleague and friend Micah Jenkins. Jenkins writes, “Regards to the snakes. Eloise [Micah’s wife] says no wonder you can’t find any one to love you” (letter from Micah Jenkins, Adams Run, SC to Bragaw, dated August 27, 1940). Bragaw responded, “Tell Eloise that I think she is right. I shall most certainly have to give up my snakes and start collecting cats and slumber pillows” (letter from Bragaw, to Micah Jenkins, dated August 30, 1940).

He also had strong family ties. In 1941 he wrote, “I have just bought a house for Mother down in Southport and the building and loan and I are working away on getting it paid for” (letter from Bragaw to James W. Clarke, San Jose, California, dated August 23, 1941). This house (which has since burned) was converted into a boarding house, known as the Camellia Inn, by his mother (“A Closer Look at Southport During WWII,” *Star News*, Wilmington, North Carolina, December 7, 2005).

As will be discussed in more detail, his time at Orton resulted in laying the foundation for a very professional and successful farming, forestry, and nursery operation. He spent considerable effort in exploring camellia

nomenclature and in multiple letters wrote of his interest and efforts to write a book helping to “straighten out” the bewilderingly complex naming of camellia varieties. In 1941 he wrote,

some of the plants are being sold in the trade under as many as nine different names. . . . I have been making colored photographs of typical flowers of the varieties as they bloom out and this has proven to be a great help in talking with people about camellias from other points. . . . My ultimate aim in this work is to try and get together the various camellia fanciers and growers and see if we cannot set forth a list of names corrected to the best of our knowledge that can serve as a camellia check list (letter from Bragaw to Mr. N.F. Vanderbilt, St. Helena, California, dated March 19, 1941).

He brought students, including a school-mate, C.A. Fox, as forestry interns at Orton. He also promoted a young woman, Emma Lou Harrelson, as the head of the Orton Nursery.

Bragaw constantly showed his professionalism in correspondence with clients and seems to have been exceedingly well liked by both the whites and blacks at Orton Plantation.

Initial Activities, 1937-1938

The Nursery

The first sale of plants to Orton that we have been able to document was by Sherwood Nursery Co. in Portland, Oregon. In 1937 Sprunt purchased “100 Daphne Odora [*Daphne odora*]” and “20 Ilex aquif aurea-regina [*Ilex aquifolium* ‘Golden Queen’].” Orton continued to conduct a great deal of business with this nursery, which continued in existence until sometime in the early 1960s.

Otherwise, 1937 is poorly documented in the Orton Nursery collection and the only record we have found is related to a problem the plantation was having with mosquitoes. The inquiry came from a Mr. Gus Wallace who was apparently working at the plantation.⁴ Mr. C. L. White, Jr., Assistant State Director, Malaria Control, with the North Carolina Department of Health visited the plantation on October 20, 1937. He described the setting,

Directly in front of Orton house and bordering the Cape Fear River are large rice fields which were abandoned some ten years ago. These fields are protected from the river by dykes. Through the dykes are gates opening into small canals which intersperse the rice fields. . . . I was told that a high tide that came over the dykes flooded the fields only a few days before this investigation. No mosquito larvae were found in the rice fields . . . however, adult specimens of *Aedes sollicitans* [eastern saltmarsh mosquito; a prime vector for Eastern equine encephalitis] were caught flying over the fields.

Most of the ditches in the rice fields are in fairly good condition. It looks as though good mosquito control may be obtained here by opening the gates through the dykes so that water may fluctuate in the canals through the fields. These canals should be kept clean and small lateral ditches dug to any areas which may pond

water on a low tide.

Behind Orton house are abandoned rice fields. I was told that these could be flooded with fresh water from a pond above them; also that they could be subjected to tidal fluctuation. The canals and ditches in these fields are practically filled with aquatic vegetation and the rice fields are covered with a heavy growth of semi-aquatic vegetation. At the time of this investigation the fields were covered with shallow water. Scattered first and second stage *Anopheles* larvae were found here . . . However, no adult *Anopheles* [the female mosquitoes of this genus transmit malaria among humans] were found in nearby outhouses. It is believed that tidal fluctuation would be a big help here in controlling mosquitoes. . . . (letter from C.L. White, Jr., Assistant State Director, Malaria Control to C.M. White, State Board of Health, Raleigh with copies to Bragaw and Wallace, dated October 29, 1937).

The following year there is an interesting document in the nursery files providing a valuation of Orton from 1934 through 1938. Its purpose is unknown, but it shows a very gradual increase in value from \$109,242 in 1934 to \$135,088 in 1938, an increase of about 24% which seems significant considering the period. In 2015\$, Orton was valued at \$1,825,800 in 1938. Most of this increase was in the value of the property, although personal property increased from \$1,075 in 1934 to \$12,375 in 1938. This likely reflects an increase in moveable property associated with the nursery, but may also evidence house upgrades indicating the Sprunts were spending more time at Orton.

There were additional purchases made of

⁴ Gus Wallace was living in Brunswick County in 1935, but by the 1940 census he was a lodger in Hickory, North Carolina and listed his occupation as a truck driver. His tenure at Orton was likely short and Bragaw was already on-staff.

plant stock in 1938. From Sherwood Nursery in Portland, Sprunt acquired 1,000 "Erica med. Hybrida" [*Erica mediterranea hybrid*], 100 "Erica med. Madima", 1,000 *Daphne odoro*, and 2,000 "Pink Perfection Camellias."

The problem throughout is the difficulty determining what was purchased for use at Orton as opposed to forming the nucleus of the nursery stock. Of course, it is likely that purchases sought to achieve both goals and some plants may have been propagated by cuttings.

It is likely that many of the Pink Perfection camellias were set into the gardens. They bloom over a long season from fall into spring, producing perfect formal double flowers. The *Daphne odoro*, or winter daphne, is an evergreen shrub grown for its very fragrant pale-pink flowers. The other plant acquired in a very large quantity was the hardy heath, "Erica med. Hybrida." This plant flowers in the winter and is reportedly uninjured by frosts.

Sprunt also made a very significant purchase of bulbs from Swart & Company, Sassenheim, Holland.⁵ The purchase included 2,000 *Tulipa Clusiana* [Lady Tulip (*Tulipa clusiana*)], 5,000 *Scilla Campanulata* [Wood hyacinth *Scilla campanulata*] white and mixed, 1,000 *Scilla Siberica* [Siberian Squill, *Scilla siberica*], 1,250 *Scilla Chionodoxa* [Glory of the Snow, *Chionodoxa spp.*], and 1,000 *Allium blue* and white [*Allium spp.*] (order from Sprunt dated August 22, 1938).

Another smaller order was placed with Le-Mac Nurseries, Hampton, Virginia for 110 *Danae Racemosa* [Poet's Laurel, *Danae racemosa*], 110 *Helleborus Niger* [Christmas rose or black hellebore, *Helleborus niger*], 10 *Cotoneaster Lactea* [Parney Cotoneaster or Red Clusterberry, *Cotoneaster lactea*], and 10 *Pyracantha Gibbsi*

[*Pyracantha atalantoides*, Gibbs firethorn] (December 29, 1938 invoice). Bragaw ordered 50 mimosa [*Albizia julibrissin*] trees from The Howard-Hickory Co., Hickory, NC on February 25, 1938.

It appears that both Sprunt and Bragaw were reaching out to a variety of sources, both commercial and private. It is likely that Orton acquired plants very early from Fruitland Nurseries in Augusta, Georgia. In addition, there is correspondence between Mrs. L.E. Miles, Marion, SC and Sprunt concerning his possible interest in acquiring her specimen camellia. She wrote,

the japonica plant from which I sent you a bloom is seven feet tall and a heavy bloomer. I will sell this plant for fifty dollars (\$50) and you lift same (letter from Mrs. L.E. Miles, Marion, SC to Sprunt, dated February 18, 1938).

While it is uncertain if Sprunt acquired this particular camellia, the records document that he did purchase other plants from private collections. For example, there is correspondence between Mr. Sam Nash⁶ and Sprunt about the removal of several camellias,

I can do anything you want in connection with moving the two big plants, or arrange to get it done. But am doing nothing unless I hear from you, on the assumption that you will have jacks, rollers, timbers and all such as may be necessary. I will

⁵ Swart & Company has provided professional grade flower bulbs since 1935. Prior to the early 1960s most products were company-grown in the bulb fields in Sassenheim. Today bulbs are grown on contract, although the firm is still family owned.

⁶ Sam Nash was the brother of Sprunt's wife, Annie Gray Nash. His letterhead indicated the range of his activities, "Plants Landscape Service Flowers." It is unknown what role Nash may have played in the garden at Orton, although he and Sprunt (as well as Bragaw) cooperated on many levels. In another letter dated November 17, 1938, Nash repays a \$75 loan, remarking, "You let me have it at a time I needed it dreadfully and I am deeply appreciative."

arrange with the city authorities to have the street closed for whatever time it may require. And I think there will be 5 or 6 laborers on the job in any event. If you want me to do anything more, let me know (letter from Sam Nash, Tarboro, NC to Sprunt, dated October 28, 1938).

Ultimately five plants were moved, but Nash wrote, "What a shame that we should have underestimated the cost of moving these five big plants" (letter from Sam Nash, Tarboro, North Carolina to Sprunt, no date).

The only plant that was clearly acquired for the Orton nursery – and likely for cuttings – was the Blood of China camellia from the Longview Nursery in Crichton, Alabama. When Sprunt purchased the plant, the nursery owner wrote back,

I feel this Camellia [Book of China] is too valuable to plant into your native soil without making a complete chemical analysis of your soil. For this reason, if you will send me a 2 lb sample . . . from the spot where you expect to place the BLOOD OF CHINA Camellia, I will be glad to make this soil analysis complimentary. . . . I know you will get a big thrill out of this Camellia when it comes into bloom and it would be a wise plan to select a location where the public has difficulty in getting to the plan, for it may tempt some people to steal it (letter from Robert O. Rubel, Jr., Longview Nursery, Crichton, AL to Sprunt, dated August 16, 1938).

The Blood of China camellia is described as a "deep, but brilliant, salmon red with reticulated darker veins, occasionally a few petals

in the center are slightly splashed white" (Campbell 2013:25). It was propagated at Longview in 1931 from a plant originally acquired from the "Industrial Gardener's Boy's Home" in Mobile. Longview sent out dramatic publicity on the new camellia (Figure 14) and ultimately Orton purchased several of these camellias.

Prior to 1938 it appears that Sprunt had little success with his nursery operations and this may have played a role in his decision to hire a young professional. In a January letter Sprunt explains,

We had bad luck with our azaleas last Summer due to the fact that the small plants were planted too deep . . . and we lost a great many of them. The ones that came through will need some nursing this Summer to make them presentable, and I will, therefore, have practically nothing for sale this Spring, except a few scattered lots such as you saw. . . . I have a very finely trained young man, who is now in charge of the nursery and plant propagation at Orton and by next year this time I expect that we will have a great many choice azaleas; I am going to make an effort to put these out to florists and other nurserymen at a price that will be very attractive, and I hope that we can have lots of business together (letter to Mrs. Fred McKay, no location, from Sprunt, dated January 31, 1938).

For this early period we have almost no information regarding sales at the Orton Nursery. Only one daily report, for November 17, survives from 1938. It lists the following cash sales:

1 Harlequin @ \$3
3 Sara C. Hastie @ \$5
2 Prof. Sergeant @ \$3.50



Figure 14. Promotional brochure distributed by Longview Nursery for their "Blood of China" camellia.

1 Prof. Sergeant @ \$2
1 Prof. Sergeant @ \$3
35 Japonicas @ .50
3 Japonicas @ .75
5 Japonicas @ \$2

All of these plants are camellias. Most are common camellias (the 43 "Japonicas") and must have been very small sizes given their prices. Thus, it appears that from an early date, Sprunt focused the nursery on camellias

Harlequin is not listed in the American Camellia Society Encyclopedia, but is found in the International Camellia Society list where it is reported to first appear in the Fruitland Nursery Catalog for 1933-1934 as variegated white and pink with full double, peony-like flowers (Savage 1993:D-40).

What is today "Debutante" was originally registered as "Sarah C. Hastie" in 1930 and introduced in 1938 by the Gerbing Azalea Nursery in Florida. The flowers are peony-form, clear pink and appear early to mid-season (Savage 1993:D-48, H-40).

Professor Sargent is described by the International Camellia Society list as large, of vivid dark crimson; the center petals raised, outer petals imbricated; a remarkable anemone-form flower. It is found in the Longview catalog by 1928, but may have been imported into USA by Berkman's Nursery (later Fruitland) from Seidel Nursery, Germany (Savage 1993:P-151).

It is interesting that correspondence reveals that by 1938 the Orton Pink camellia was being sold under that name (letter from H.E. Green to Sprunt, dated December 17, 1938).⁷ Therefore, it must have been an existing variety at Orton on which Sprunt sought to capitalize.

Other than plants, Orton was already involved in the sale of cut flowers by 1938,

although it seems with very mixed success.

There is surviving correspondence with Pennock Florists in Philadelphia concerning the shipment of camellia blossoms.⁸ An initial shipment to Pennock "arrived in very good condition. They were packed very well, and stood the handling fine" (letter from Pennock Florists, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Bragaw, dated January 21, 1938). Subsequent shipments, however, did not fare as well,

We are enclosing herewith our check for \$4.00, covering the two shipments of camellias, and would suggest that for the present you do not ship any more until we get in touch with you. Business has taken a decided slump, and we can get them in this market for less than we pay you, either straight or on consignment, and even at that, the two shipments did not arrive in first class condition. From the first lot we sold four. Several blooms arrived loose in the box, clips had broken away, and the flowers were bruised. Then the shipment received this P.M., seven of them fell apart when we went to unfasten them. They really should have been wired. We realize the first few shipments are more or less an experiment, and only by our frank criticisms of packing, etc. can you profit. We trust you will understand our position, and shall get in touch with you as soon as business picks up (letter from Pennock Florists, Philadelphia, PA to Sprunt, dated

⁷ Today Orton Pink is recognized as a synonym for Brooklynia (Savage 1993:B-150).

⁸ The Pennock Company was founded in 1882 in Philadelphia by Charles E. Pennock and the company pioneered the concept of floral wholesaling. Today the company has eight locations along the Eastern Seaboard from Florida to Massachusetts.

February 8, 1938).

It may be that Orton had better success in the shipment of their cut daffodils. A New Rochelle, New York florist wrote inquiring if Orton shipped "direct to florists 25 dozen in a box and the price a box," wanting a box a week (letter from A.J. Rees, Halcyon Flower Shop, New Rochelle, NY to Bragaw, dated January 28, 1938).

In 1938 Orton was also shipping at least some Christmas greens, although it not clear how significant the business was.

Both Sprunt and Bragaw were working diligently to promote Orton as widely as possible. For perhaps the first time, Orton promoted its nursery throughout the region with a 1-inch advertisement in the September, October, November, and December issues of *The Southern Garden*. This was a Raleigh, North Carolina periodical which was first published that year. As a result of that very minimal investment, Bragaw received requests for the nursery's catalog from North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Pennsylvania.

The plantation was also receiving assistance from the State of North Carolina through the auspices of the NC Dept of Conservation and Development. A press release prepared by Bill Sharpe (who would write numerous articles about Orton) announced that the gardens, "are now offering sasanqua camellias, tea olive, Japanese plum and other blossoms."

As a result the plantation began receiving national attention. A Philadelphia newspaper, for example, announced that,

The famous gardens of Orton Plantation at Winnabow . . . are beginning to burst into a profusion of color and blooms. The white camellias are opening now and by January there will be 50 different varieties in bloom, ranging through every hue and color, and presenting a gleamingly colorful contrast to the surrounding winter-drab countryside. . . . miles of walkways shaded by moss-draped oaks, the flower gardens,

old rice fields, "King" Roger's graveyard, ruins of St. Phillips Church, and the ruins of Governor Tryon's palace are open to visitors" ("Famous Plantation Gardens Attract Winter Visitors," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 27, 1938).

Promoting the plantation and its gardens, Sprunt gave two camellia plants to North Carolina Governor Clyde R. Hoey. In a February 26 letter to Sprunt, the Governor exclaimed that the camellias, "are perfectly wonderful, and Mrs. Hoey joins me in expression of high appreciation to you. We shall give them a very choice location about the Mansion."

Sprunt promoted his bulb sales (suggesting that at least part of the large order from Swart & Company may have been for resale) by offering Dr. Frederic M. Hanes, Duke University School of Medicine bulbs without cost for the school's garden, explaining "if you can use some mixed bulbs that are very healthy, I would be glad to make the garden a present of some" and also offered several camellia varieties "as an experiment, and if they were not satisfactory, the garden would not be out of pocket."

Bragaw was equally as busy, forging a relationship with the Home Demonstration Agent in Raleigh, as well as speaking to various garden and women's clubs.

The available documents also reveal that Bragaw was busy trying to make Orton profitable. A major issue seems to have been irrigation. While a water tower was erected at Orton about 1910, it seems that nearly 30 years later the needs of the nursery were exceeding the capacity of the tank – or at least the existing pump system.

W.T. Miars, from Hyman Supply Co. in Wilmington, was invited out to Orton to examine the existing system and offer recommendations of how capacity could be increased. Miars reported that Ortons existing "old style 6 x 6 pump" could be fixed, but that it was able to only pump 80 gallons a minute. In addition, he reported that the tank, only 40 feet in height, was providing only "20 lbs. pressure on the main right under the

tank.” Miars suggested abandoning the tank and pumping water directly from the creek. Even with the repaired old unit Bragaw would be able to obtain 50psi. However, Miars recommended using a centrifugal pump, capable of providing at least 160 gallons of water per minute. This “modern” pump was so preferable that Miars explained that his firm “never use[s] a tank of any description today in any of our irrigation jobs whether they are large or small” (letter from W.T. Miars, Hyman Supply Co., Wilmington, NC to Bragaw, dated October 26, 1938).

This suggests that Bragaw was working on establishing adequate irrigation for the nursery. Indirectly it may also suggest that the first greenhouse dates from this early period, although we have found no correspondence to support this view. It is, however, also consistent with Knott and her colleagues, who believe that “the older of the two surviving greenhouses at Orton is believed to have been built during Mr. Bragaw’s stay as manager” (Knott et al. 2014:57).

Bragaw also had to confront an even greater problem at Orton than the water supply. One of the most significant health threats in America during this period was venereal disease. Routine serologic tests revealed a syphilis rate of 205 per 1,000 among Southern African Americans and 175 per 1,000 among African American women at prenatal clinics. These rates far exceed those identified for whites (Putney 1938). The efforts to control syphilis in the United States essentially began with the appointment of Dr. Thomas Parran as Surgeon General in 1936. In 1938 Congress passed the National Venereal Control Act, sponsored by Senator Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin and Congressman Alfred Bulwinkle of North Carolina. The legislation established syphilis control efforts at the national level, allocating \$15 million over the next three fiscal years. The legislation funded clinics, training, and medication.

It appears that Bragaw wrote the North Carolina State Board of Health in Raleigh concerning treatment programs from his African American employees, learning that treatments

were available in Southport. He was copied on a letter from the county nurse to the Board of Health in which she explained that “our Venereal Clinic . . . is now operating nicely. Last Saturday we had 29 patients at the clinic – two paid 25¢ each; the others received free treatments.” It is also interesting that there was some distrust, with the nurse explaining, “the parties that were instrumental in tearing up our clinic soon saw their mistake and came to me and confessed that they did it, but they were sorry and would not do it again, if I would get it back together” (letter from Lou H. Smith, County Nurse, Brunswick County Health Department, Southport to Dr. D.C. Knox, Director, Division of Epidemiology and

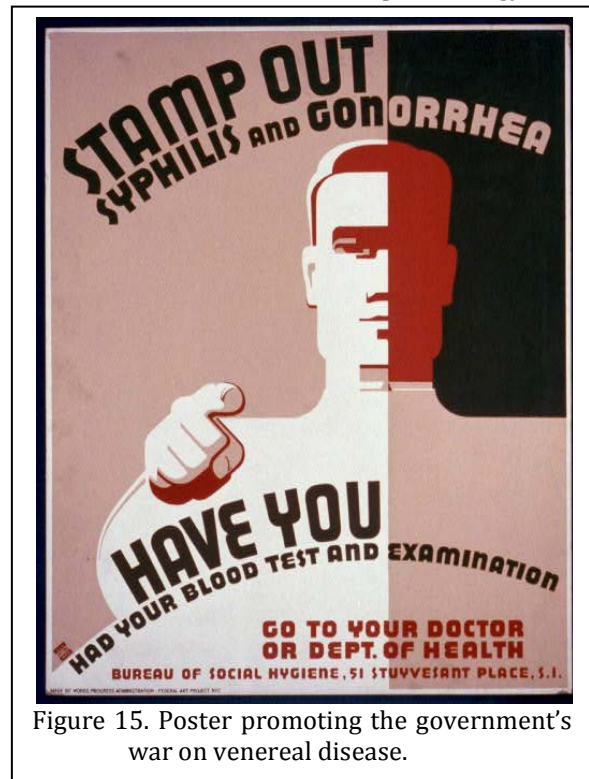


Figure 15. Poster promoting the government’s war on venereal disease.

Venereal Disease Control, NC State Board of Health, Raleigh with copy to Bragaw, dated October 5, 1938).

While this may have been altruistic, it is also possible that Bragaw saw the ravages of venereal disease and recognized that it would affect the productivity of Orton’s workers. Bragaw certainly discovered that as manager of the

plantation he had to deal with a variety of personnel issues.

Another personnel example is the problem between Annabel and Herman Ellis, a married African American couple at Orton. In the summer of 1938 Annabelle took their child and left her husband, claiming that her husband's family was making life impossible. Going to the local courts asking for relief, she was told,

It may be that you are expecting more of your husband than you should. I am not so sure that the law would require him to support you at a home of your selection, unless you had to select a home because of cruelty or gross mistreatment on the part of your husband or the person with who he put you to live. . . . I am inclined to suggest to you that you send for Herman, your husband, and have a talk with him. It is better for you and him to forget your people, and his people and make up your minds to live together, and get along. If you don't do that it will probably be very much worse for you, for your child, and for the county (letter from C. E. Taylor, attorney, Southport to Annabelle Ellis c/o Bragaw, dated July 22, 1938).

The situation apparently was resolved to some degree, but only for a short time since in the summer of 1939, Taylor next wrote Annabelle's husband,

At the present time she is now confronted with the matter of living, she expects you to do your part toward the support of she and the child, that you have sent a very small amount of money, only \$2.50, since the 25th of May when she had to leave and go to her sister. This, of course, is not

your part, since you are employed in a regular way. The law requires more support from you than that. The question arises whether you are willing to do the part of a husband and provide a home for her and the child or not. If you are willing to try and provide a home for her she probably would do her part. You know best about whether you want to do this or not. . . . I am therefore, writing this letter to inform that if you fail to support your child, and also your wife, she being without fault, to the extent that you are able, then it will seem the way is open for the law to come in and having something to say about it. . . . (letter from C. E. Taylor, attorney, Southport, to Herman Ellis, dated July 18, 1939).

Bragaw's college education may not have prepared him for such situations, but it appears that he not only handled the issue with grace, but never lost the support of the African American community.

Agriculture

We have far less information regarding the agricultural activities on Orton during the early years. In fact, the only surviving correspondence is between Sprunt and the Fayetteville, North Carolina farmer S.H. MacPherson, owner of Hollywood Farm. In 1938 MacPherson wrote Sprunt, "I have been advised that you grow quite a lot of Rye on your Orton Plantation and wondered if you would advise me what kind it is and your best price on several hundred bushels . . ." (letter from S.H. MacPherson, Fayetteville, North Carolina to Sprunt, dated July 26, 1938).

We don't know the response, but later that same year MacPherson wrote again, offering Sprunt, "Coker's certified Fulgrain oats, first year from breeder, at \$.90 f.o.b. Fayetteville, NC" (letter

from S.H. MacPherson, Fayetteville, North Carolina to Sprunt, dated September 19, 1938). This suggests that MacPherson may have been trying to negotiate a trade.

Regardless, it seems likely that Orton was growing at least rye, and perhaps oats.

Forestry

Forestry records during these early years are not especially complete, but we do have a record of the NC State College of Agriculture and Engineering at the University of North Carolina, Raleigh purchasing 1,500 ft of cypress 1x6 lumber and 1500 ft of cypress 2x6 lumber for a construction project on campus. In addition, the Castle Hayne Land & Lumber Co. was making purchases of cut timber directly from Orton. Both of these accounts reveal that Orton was not only cutting timber, but also milling it for sale as dimensional lumber.

By 1931 the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development had developed Forest Protective Associations – groups of landowners that contributed on a per acre basis to assist in fire control. In that year the Orton Protective Association was noted as having been formed with one owner – James Laurence Sprunt – and 12,000 acres. The following year another owner had joined and the acreage had increased to 23,000 acres. These owners paid into the state fund 2¢ per acre. The report identified the Orton tower as steel, 80 feet in height. Orton was also making old woods roads suitable for use during fire fighting (Harrelson 1932:46, 48-49).

In 1932 a branch Civilian Conservation Corp camp was established near Orton. The men were under the control of C.H. Hearn, and the work on the 43,000 acres of association land included construction of fire lanes, roads, and telephone lines ("Branch CCC Camp Planned Near Orton," *Morning Star*, Wilmington, NC, November 11, 1933).

By 1936 there were two associations: Orton Protective Association with 19 members and 36,000 acres and the J.L. Sprunt Association with one member and 15,000 acres. The members of the

Orton association paid 2¢ an acre, while Sprunt paid 7½¢ per acre – the largest amount of any group in the state (Etheridge 1936:40). During 1935 and 1936 over 12 miles of telephone lines had been installed to connect the Orton tower to Reed's tower, allowing for fires to be triangulated (Etheridge 1936:42). More detailed research would be necessary to determine why Sprunt had organized his own association, as well as if he continued to pay into the Orton Protective Association.

Nevertheless, the report for 1938 found both organizations still in existence with Orton composed of 11 members and 62,000 acres, while the Sprunt Protective Association had only one member and 15,000 acres. The Orton members paid 2¢ per acre, while Sprunt paid between 2 and 4¼¢ per acre (Etheridge 1938:45).

Of the 11 property owners, Sprunt held 15,000 acres and paid \$300 as his assessment. The next largest owner was Hugh McRae (1865-1951), a developer and industrialist of the early 20th century, holding 10,000 acres and paying \$200. The third largest holding was by the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Co. with 6,392 acres and an assessment of \$127.84.

The association funds, matched by the state using federal funds, paid the association ranger on a yearly basis, hired a Towerman-Smokechaser for nine months out of the year, paid for fire fighting, as well as for the labor burning fire lines.

The association burned 31 miles of fire lines an average width of 60 feet, as well as 16 miles of road shoulders with an average burn width of 10 feet. At least some of this work was being done by the Orton tractor, although the association owned a 22 Caterpillar Tractor, a 6,000 pound agricultural crawler tractor with a 4 cylinder, liquid cooled engine, and a drawbar power of about 25mph. The association also owned a Ford pick-up truck, and a 2-disc Hester Plow. The Louisiana Division of Forestry noted that,

The Hester fire-line plow has been widely and effectively used

by Southern forest protective organizations for fire-break construction. This disc-type plow is manufactured in 4 models, including a 2-disc maintenance plow. All models are designed for pulling behind crawler type tractors, and have adjustable wheels which govern the depth of the cut and, on which the plow may be transported from one location to another without plowing. The purchase price ranges from \$350 to \$500. When in operation, the plows cast soil beyond the shoulders on either side of the actual cut, thereby increasing the effective width of the line plowed (Louisiana Division of Forestry 1937).

With only a maintenance plow, Sprunt wanted to use the association funds to purchase a harrow for the fire line work, since Orton's equipment was being used for that work. The idea was approved,

It will be entirely satisfactory to purchase a harrow out of joint funds. . . . It appears to me that the best plan for us is to get some dynamite, blow out the stumps which remain in these fire lines, particularly exterior lines, and then prepare them in a manner which will enable us to run this heavy harrow over the lines regularly (letter from W.C. McCormick, Chief of Forest Fire Control, Raleigh to Sprunt, dated March 1, 1938).

Growth and Maturity, 1939-1941

While there may be disagreement, it is our view that the years from 1939 through about 1941 represent the growth of the Orton Nursery to a fully functioning enterprise. While it very

likely was not yet producing a significant revenue, we believe that Bragaw firmly established sound operating principals and made Orton a leader in nursery production.

In 1939-1940 Orton was listed as a certified nursery with 3 acres of ornamental plants, as well as being a certified narcissus bulb grower (North Carolina Department of Agriculture, *Season 1939-1940 Certified Nurseries of North Carolina*). By 1941 Orton was boasting 350 varieties of camellias, with 275 varieties for sale (letter to Mr. George T. Bailey, Wilson, North Carolina, from Bragaw, dated June 26, 1941). By 1941 admission to the gardens had increased to \$1.00.

The Nursery

In 1939 Orton purchased over 4,500 plants from 13 nurseries. Two nurseries, both in California, shipped the most plants to Orton.

Bragaw purchased at least 1,941 plants from W.B. Clarke & Company, San Jose, in 1939. Walter Clarke (1876-1953) was manager of the Cottage Nursery, also in San Jose from 1919 until at least 1922, prior to founding his own company by at least 1927 as a specialty nursery for ornamental woody plants. Clarke's plants are found in a number of arboreetums, as well as DuPont's Winterthur garden.

Most of the W.B. Clarke purchases were single specimens. There were, however, a few plants where large numbers were acquired. These include 306 "Myrtus communis compacta," a dwarf myrtle; 200 "Daphne odora marginata" (probably *Daphne odora* 'Aureo-marginata' or the variegated winter daphne); 112 "Viburnum burkwoodii" (known today as *Viburnum x burkwoodii* or the Burkwood Viburnum); and 100 "Osmanthus delavayi," sometimes known as devilwood. Many of these plants were immediately sold in the Orton nursery, although we can't discount their use in the garden landscape as well.

Bragaw took a long trip out west in 1939, part vacation, part buying trip. During this effort

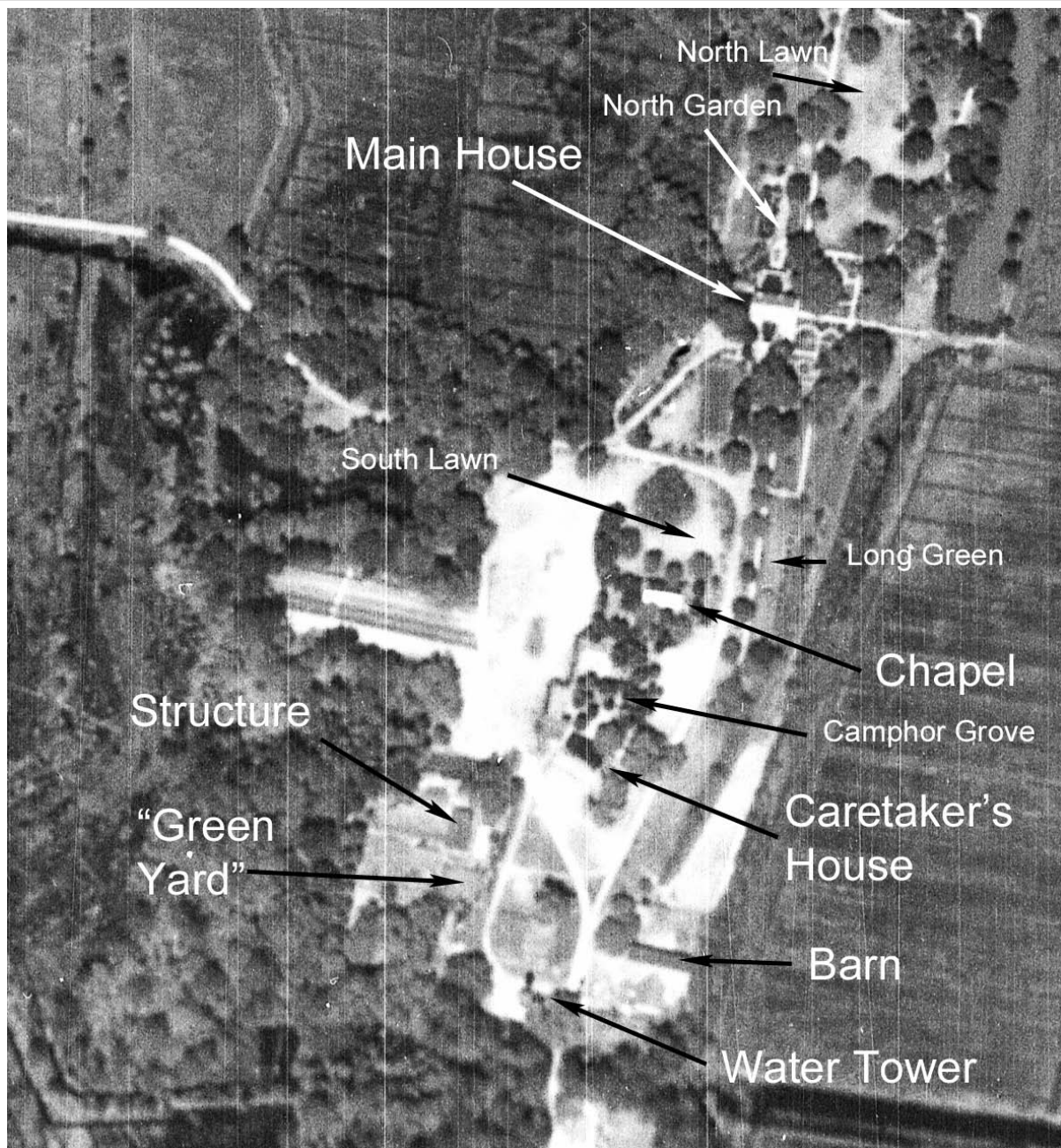


Figure 16. 1939 aerial of the main Orton Plantation complex. Primary structures are shown in large type, while the garden and lawn features are shown in smaller type. Compare this aerial image to Figures 11 and 12).

he met personally the owners of a number of nurseries, forging not only business partnerships, but long-term friendships. In addition, he explained that while he had visited more regional nurseries, he chose not to purchase from them, "because of a possibility of introducing that terrible new pest – the white fringed beetle⁹ – which had made its appearance in Mobile and the vicinity" (letter from Bragaw to George F. Peterson, Chico, California, dated October 23, 1939).

At the W.B. Clarke and Company Nursery he made arrangements to have nurseries ship to Clarke and then Clarke combined orders into two rail cars for delivery to Wilmington (letter from W.R. Clarke, San Jose, California to Bragaw, dated December 14, 1939).

The next largest number, at least 1,072, came from the Lindo Nursery in Chico. This nursery was begun by Fred Petersen in 1907 while he was still the head gardener for Annie

⁹ *Naupactus leucoloma*, the white fringed beetle were first found in Okaloosa County, Florida, in 1936 and then were discovered in adjoining counties in Alabama where they were causing serious damage to cotton, corn, and peanuts in the infested areas. A cooperative Federal-State quarantine was begun, but the beetles were found in Louisiana and Mississippi in 1937. In 1942 some were collected in North Carolina at Wilmington. In 1946 infestations were discovered in Georgia near Eastman, Fort Valley, and Macon. Inspections during 1946 of properties landscaped with ornamental plants obtained from nurseries in the infested area in Georgia disclosed many additional infestations in that State, as well as two in Alabama and one in South Carolina. In 1948 the beetle was found in Tennessee. On January 1, 1952, nearly 340,000 acres (including 100,000 acres of farm land) were infested.

Table 2.
Camellia Varieties Obtained from Multiple Nurseries in 1939

Camellia	Nursery
Alba Plena	Fruitland, Gerbing's
Arajishi	Lindo, Toichi Domoto
C.M. Hovey	Armstrong, Fruitland
Chandleri Elegens	Fruitland, Lindo
Christina Lee	Fruitland, Gerbing's
Cliviana	Fruitland, Lindo
Daikagura	Armstrong, Fruitland, Lindo, McCaskill, Toichi Domoto
Debryana	Fruitland, Gerbing's
Emperor of Russia	Armstrong, Gerbing's, Toichi Domoto
Fannie Bolis	Armstrong, Lindo
Gigantea	Fruitland, Gerbing's
Governor Mouton	Gerbing's, Lindo
Grandiflora Rosea	Lindo, Toichi Domotoi
Imperator	Armstrong, Fruitland, Gerbing's, Lindo
John G. Drayton	Armstrong, Lindo
Kumasaka	Fruitland, Linda
Pink Perfection	Armstrong, Sherwood
Sarah C. Hastie	Fruitland, Lindo
Sweet Vera	Fruitland, Lindo
William S. Hastie	Fruitland, Lindo

Bidwell at the Bidwell Mansion. Petersen was known as the "Camellia King" of the United States, developing six varieties into more than 600 and winning many prizes. In 1948 Mrs. Petersen sold the nursery to Ray Johnson, co-owner of Christian & Johnson Feed and Seed. The location was moved and the name was changed to Christian & Johnson. The nursery closed in the early 2000s.

In an early letter to Bragaw, George F. Peterson explained that he had "the finest collection of Camellias on the Pacific Coast" with more than 90 in his price list and "a total of about 300 varieties" (letter from George F. Peterson, Chico, California to Bragaw, dated February 8, 1939).

Most of the plants purchased from Lindo were individual camellia specimens or a few dozen at most. In fact, only two plants were acquired in quantities over 30. Bragaw purchased 39 "Daikagura Variety" japonica camellia and 33 "John G. Drayton" camellias. Regardless, it is clear that Orton relied heavily on Lindo Nursery for the bulk of its camellias. It is likely that even those purchased as individual specimens either had clippings rooted or were grafted on rootstock.

Examples of these single purchases were Peoniaflora, Belgian Red, Candida, Warranta White, John G. Drayton, Somegawa, Campbell, Matasukara, Anne Lindberg, Fannie Bolis, Donkilare, Warranta Red, Comete de Gomer, and Colonel Fiery.

Sherwood Nursery, from which Orton acquired plants earlier, provided an additional 425 Pink Perfection camellias.

Armstrong Nursery in Ontario, California sold Orton 282 plants. The business was begun in 1889 by John Armstrong, selling primarily eucalyptus and olive trees. Armstrong ultimately focused on roses, although they also developed a wide range of ornamentals and fruit trees. The company is still in business today as both a wholesaler and retailer.

Although a few camellias were acquired from Armstrong, most of the purchases were individual specimens of fruit trees such as limes, oranges, plums, persimmons, apples, figs, and peaches.

The vast majority of azalea purchases came from Gerbing's Azalea Gardens in Amelia City, Florida. The garden was advertised to contain more than 300 varieties of azaleas and camellias. While it continued in operation into the early 1940s, we have found little else about this nursery. Bragaw, however, also selected Alba Plena camellias from Gerbing's, writing specifically that the ones he desired were "15-18-inches at \$2.00;" in addition he explained, "I am quite sure now that I will be able to use some of your more common varieties in the small sizes that we looked at in the field. Could you give me any better price than the one quoted in your catalogue, if I could a large quantity of them?" (letter from Bragaw to G.G. Gerbing, Fernandina, Florida, dated October 23, 1939).

A variety of camellias were also acquired from Fruitland Nurseries in Augusta, Georgia. This nursery began in 1857 when father and son, Louis and Prosper Berckmans, acquired an existing farm filled with fruit trees. They focused primarily on

peaches. By 1918 the original nursery was closed and the trade name was sold to R. L. Wheeler, a foreman of the previous operation. A new Fruitland Nursery was opened about 1919 and continued in business until closing in the late 1960s.

Smaller quantities of plants were obtained from the Howard-Hickory Nursery Company, Hickory, North Carolina (assorted, 52 plants); Le Mac Nursery, Hampton, Virginia (azaleas, 20 plants); Wayside Gardens, Mentor, Ohio (12 wisteria); Garden Nurseries, Narberth, Pennsylvania (14 plants, primarily wisteria); Glen St. Mary Nursery, Glen St. Mary, Florida (100 bamboo plants); Toichi Domoto, Hayward, California (29 camellias); Coolidge Rare Plant Garden, East Pasadena, California (assorted, at least six plants); and McCaskill Gardens, Pasadena, California (55 camellias).

Twenty varieties of camellia were acquired from more than one nursery (Table 2). In many cases this was necessitated by the sizes desired. However, the acquisition from several nurseries may also suggest differences in the stock. In either case, it certainly indicates that the Orton camellias had a variety of origins.

Hugo Jahns, a landscape gardener and contractor in Summerville, South Carolina with whom Bragaw would develop a strong relationship, also sold Orton a variety of cuttings, apparently intended to help establish their nursery. Included in the sale were 1,500 Alba Pena, 500 Ottonice, 1,400 Hermie, 200 C.F. Middleton, 1756 Feste, 350 Pink Perfection, 150 Prince Albert, 300 Julia J. Jahiz, and 400 Madam Chadwig.

Bragaw also began a strong relationship with Micah Jenkins in Adams Run, South Carolina. Some plants were purchased outright (mostly specimen camellias), although others were traded for gardenias and 5 bushels of bulbs.

Orton was also selling plants in 1939. One large order went to Howard-Hickory Company in November 1939. It seems that Orton was still

trying to establish itself, based on the correspondence. Once received, S. D. Tankard of Howard-Hickory complained to Bragaw that "so many of the Azaleas received from you last week have such a very small amount of roots and ball that we are afraid they will not survive planting out on our landscape jobs in this part of the country, which is not so very well adapted to azaleas" (Letter to Bragaw from S.D. Tankard, Hickory, North Carolina, dated November 25, 1939). They also complained that the azaleas lacked density and they had been told that the plants would come from those lining a walk, not from beds. This suggests that Bragaw was selling off some of the azaleas in the Orton gardens. Although we don't have his response, Bragaw received another letter a few weeks later in which Tankard explained that,

we really do not feel that what we received are worth over half as much as what we thought we were going to get. At the same time, we will not ask you to cut the bill in half, but do feel it should be reduced as much as 33⅓%. Again we assure you that we hate to have to make any complaint at all (letter from S.D. Tankard, Hickory, North Carolina to Bragaw, dated December 13, 1939).

By 1941 the quantity of outside purchases was dramatically reduced to about 756 plants from only seven nurseries. Most of these plants (360 specimens) came from Casey's Nursery in Goldsboro, North Carolina. These included 250 peach trees, 70 muscadines, and 10 pecan trees.

Blackwell Nursery in Semmes, Alabama sold Orton 100 Pride of Mobile azaleas. Another previously unused nursery was Royal Palms Nurseries in Oneco, Florida where Bragaw purchased 12 plants, including agave. Armstrong sold Orton 99 grape plants of different varieties, while W.B. Clarke and Company provided 100 mixed plants. Glen St. Mary Nursery provided an additional 83.

These sales suggest that Orton's stock was largely defined in 1939 and 1940 and by 1941 Bragaw was simply adding specimens and experimental plants.

On February 18, 1939 Bragaw wrote to Mrs. G.T. Floyd in Marion, South Carolina, explaining that while they had not published a "catalog," he was sending her the Orton price list. Bragaw remedied this by the end of the year, when he had Capital Printing Company in Wilmington prepare a "folder" with color pictures and a price list. A 1940 letter described the resulting catalog,

Your new Plant List was received yesterday . . . I consider it a valuable pamphlet. The azalea and camellia cultural directions alone are worth a great deal to a grower and lover of these plants" (letter from Mrs. J.I. Alphin, Hattiesburg, Mississippi to Bragaw, dated December 27, 1939).

In other correspondence we find that Bragaw was typically telling wholesalers that "I have most of the varieties of camellias, but as yet do not have sufficient numbers to offer good wholesale prices" although he was allowing a 20% deduction from retail prices (letter to Lewis Nurseries, Roslyn, Long Island, New York, by Bragaw, dated March 3, 1939). In other letters he explained that he was currently propagating 300 varieties of camellias.

By 1940 Bragaw was allowing a wholesale discount that ranged from 20 to 50%, depending on the plant, his stock, as well as the specific wholesaler. This judgment may have been based on credit worthiness, although we suspect other factors were also involved, including the size of the prospective order, the possibility of forging a long-term relationship, and even the possibility of bartering.

For example, while he allowed a 50% discount on azaleas to Mrs. W.L. Thrower of

Thower's Floral Shop in Laurinburg, North Carolina, he provided a "40% discount on our list prices on azaleas and 30% on camellias listed under Group 1" to Mrs. W.E. Miller, Greenville Floral Company, Greenville, North Carolina. In a letter to Mr. Rudolf Anderson, Greenville Nursery Company, Greenville, South Carolina, he allowed, "40% from the retail prices quoted and we will give you a discount on the camellias and other items according to our stock on hand and scarcity of the variety."

In 1939 the records indicate that Orton plants were sold to a wide range of wholesalers, including Butler Nurseries, Fayetteville, North Carolina; Oak Lawn Nurseries, Mayesville, South Carolina; Cooke Brothers, Hampton, Virginia; Winn Nursery, Norfolk, Virginia; Holly Tree Nursery, Southern Pines, North Carolina; Reynolda, Reynolda, North Carolina; and Wilson J. Crowell Roses, Concord, North Carolina.

Without a catalog, Bragaw spent what must have been a great deal of time writing responses to individual inquiries. For example,

I have specimen plants of Kurme Azaleas in PINK PERFECTION, HINODEGIRI, CORAL BELLE and CHRISTMAS CHEER. I can give you these plants in sizes from 12 to 18 inches and a few up to 24 inches. The 12 to 15 inch plants are \$1.60 and the 15 to 18 inch plants are \$2.25 We allow 10% discount from this list price in lots of 20 or more plants" (letter to Mrs. Emmett Moore, Trenton, North Carolina by Bragaw, dated February 19, 1939).

In another letter,

Orton Big Red No. 1 is a deep clear red and makes a very desirable plant. I can furnish this variety in sizes 18-24", 24-30", 30-36" for \$3.00, \$4.00 and \$5.00, plus a normal charge for packing and shipping" (letter to Mrs. I.H. Hines,

Faison, North Carolina by Bragaw, dated March 14, 1939).

Sometimes, however, Bragaw dealt with inquiries very simply, stating, "write us and we will be glad to quote you prices" (letter to Warren L. Reuther, New Orleans from Bragaw, dated October 23, 1939).

Bragaw had also already begun grafting and, in particular, offering multiple grafts on one rootstock,

[I have] sold all available grafts of more than one variety now booking orders for delivery next Fall. The price is \$15 for three varieties grafted on one root stock. The root stock is Sarah Frost and from 7 to 10 years old. You may select any variety you like from those listed in our catalogue, and I will be glad to graft it for you. I would suggest that you write us as soon as possible as I only have root stock enough to graft about 100 plants this season. The other grafts are \$7.50 for the common varieties, \$10.00 for the rare sorts, and \$15.00 for the rarer ones. All grafted on large root stocks, so you get a nice bushy plant about 3½ ft. tall and two growing seasons (letter to Mrs. J.A. [sic] Alphin, Hattiesburg, Mississippi by Bragaw, dated January 23, 1940).

Another letter which fortunately survived gives us a clear statement of how Bragaw was going about his work,

I use what is commonly called a cleft graft in grafting camellias. The under-stock is cut off at about the surface of the ground and a slit made in it right across the top. The scion is placed in this slit to one side, and over very large stock two scions are used. I do not tie them in any way, but count on the pressure of the wood holding the scion in place.

Table 3.
List of Orton African American Workers and Family Members about 1940.

Betts, Esther	Davis, Jessie	Jones, Lillian	Parker, Christa Belle
Brewington, Annie	Davis, Loa Mae	Joyner, Doris	Parker, Mary Lilly
Brewington, Burnette	Davis, Lorraine	Joyner, Evelyn	Pearsal, Aunt Lucy
Brewington, Cinda	Davis, Minnie Lee	Joyner, Willie Lee, Jr.	Pearsall, LeRoy
Brewington, Dorethy	Davis, Richard	Kelly, Cornelius	Pearsall, Lucile
Brewington, Ellen	Davis, Vivian	Kelly, Erma V.	Pearson, Hannah
Brewington, Emma Jane	Delts, A[]	Kelly, Jake, Jr.	Price, Martha
Brewington, Essie Mae	Delts, Abraham	Kelly, Jake, Jr.	Reaves, Alnetia
Brewington, Harry Lee	Delts, Abraham, Jr.	Kelly, Marie	Reaves, Barbara
Brewington, Irene	Delts, Charlie	Kelly, Pearl	Reaves, James
Brewington, Isiah, Jr.	Delts, Christabelle	King, Josephine	Reaves, Jennette
Brewington, Jenkins	Delts, Christiana	Lance, Eddie	Reaves, Jim
Brewington, John Henry	Delts, Costelia	Lance, Elizabeth	Reaves, Josie Mae
Brewington, Roy	Delts, Dillard	Lance, Queen Anne	Reaves, Kelly
Brewington, Rudolph Sinclair	Delts, Elneda	Lauritta, Francis	Reaves, Loa Mae
Brewington, Sarah	Delts, Georgia Anna	McKlammey, Lucy	Reaves, Mary Virginia
Brewington, Sarah Jane	Delts, Georgiana	McKoy, Annie Mae	Reaves, Rosa Bell
Brewington, Theadora	Delts, Harlee	McKoy, Cora Lee	Reaves, William
Brewington, William	Delts, Hazel Inez	McKoy, Dillard	Robbins, John
Brown, Clyde Clinton	Delts, Henry	McKoy, Duncan	Roberts, []
Brown, Alexander	Delts, Irene	McKoy, John	Roberts, Avon
Brown, Bennie	Delts, Katherine	McKoy, Lethia Mae	Roberts, Frank
Brown, Cinda	Delts, Katy L.	McKoy, Odell	Robins, Christina
Brown, Ernest	Delts, L[]	McKoy, Willie Jane	Rose, Mary Lilly
Brown, James	Delts, Lula Mae	McMillan, Andrew	Rose, Shirley Mae
Brown, Jimmy	Delts, Margaret	McMillan, John West	Shannon, Dan
Brown, Lawrence	Delts, Mary Nick	McMillan, Nora	Shannon, Davis
Brown, Lilly Mae	Delts, Mearleia	McRant, Evangalee	Shannon, Inez
Brown, Mary Eliza	Delts, Orine	McRant, George	Smith, Archie
Brown, Mary Liza	Delts, Pearl	McRant, Pearl	Smith, Fred
Brown, Sammy, Jr.	Delts, Queen	Monroe, Clara Belle	Smith, Joe
Brown, Sarah Jane	Delts, Rellia	Monroe, James H., Jr.	Smith, Lee
Brown, William	Edge, Johnny	Monroe, James Hadley	Smith, Shirlie Mae
Brown, Wilma	Edge, Mary Jane	Moore, Lester	Smith, Susan
Brown, Wilmer	Edge, William	Moore, Louis	Smith, Willie Lee
Clark, Charlie, Jr.	Ellis, Frank Herman	Morant, Evanglee	Vaught, Annie Ree
Clark, Edward	Ellis, Harold Franklin	Morant, George W., Jr.	Vaught, Betsy
Clark, Foster	Ellis, Herman	Morant, Jess Lee	Vaught, Clara Bell
Clark, Franklin	Green, George	Morant, Pearl L.	Vaught, Clayton Alfred
Clark, Gerthel	Green, Mary	Murray, Abel	Vaught, Eugene
Clark, Lee Andrew	Horn, J.B.	Murray, Adell	Vaught, Joe
Clark, Lee Bertha	Jones, Clarence	Orris, Emma	Vaught, John B.
Clark, Marion	Jones, Clarence, Jr.	Orris, Lillian	Vaught, Joseph, Jr.
Clark, Rosa Bell	Jones, Evelyn	Orris, Louis	Vaught, Lottie Mae
Dasher, Batrice	Jones, Josie Lee	Parker, Annette	
Davis, Alex	Jones, Julia Anna	Parker, "Boo"	

Instead of using grafting wax, I place a small mount of wet peat moss around the union and put the graft in a hot house (letter from Bragaw to Dr. E.A. Land, Norfolk, Virginia, dated March 3, 1939).

We know from various documents that Bragaw was also using Indolebutyric Acid (Indole-3-butyric acid, 1H-Indole-3-butanoic acid or IBA). IBA is a plant hormone in the auxin family and is today an ingredient in many commercial horticultural plant rooting products. At the time it was being researched at North Carolina State University and he received advice on its use from one of his professors.

A 1940 letter provides a rare glimpse at Orton's growing inventory,

Snow, Coral Bell, Hinodegiri, Pink
Pear, Christmas Cheer

6" – 60,000
8" – 40,000
10" – 10,000

Flame

6" – 20,000
8" – 10,000
10" – 5,000

In addition, he had 150,000 to 200,000 of these plants in the 4-6" size, which he noted was "a small size but they should go good at that price as they are well bushed and quite satisfactory for a plot plant" (letter to Herman Heemskerk, New York, from Bragaw, dated June 20, 1940).

By 1940 we know that Orton was providing plants wholesale to the Hammock Shop, Pawleys Island, South Carolina; Glennairy Gardens, Laurinburg, North Carolina; Howard-Hickory Co., Hickory, North Carolina; Micah Jenkins, Adams Run, South Carolina; Laird's Nursery, Richmond, Virginia; Lindley Nurseries, Greensboro, North Carolina; Camellia Nurseries, Tallahassee, Florida; Hewett P. Mulford & Company, Lebanon, Ohio; Charles V. Jacobsen & Sons, Pontiac, Michigan; Butler Nurseries, Fayetteville, North Carolina; Klang's Greenhouses,

Detroit, Michigan; Greenville Floral Co., Greenville, North Carolina; Greenbrier Farms, Norfolk, Virginia; Fair View Nursery, Wilson, North Carolina, and Tudor's Florist, Wilson, North Carolina.

In addition to outright sales, Bragaw was also developing consignments, including with Butler Nurseries and McKay Floral Garden in Dunn, North Carolina. Begun at least by 1939, not all consignments were easy, however. One owner complained,

What under the sun is the matter. You promised us Azaleas in November. We, in turn, passed the promise along to our customers. It is now December and we have not heard from you . . . There still is that little matter of our overpayment of \$16.80 for which you said you would send us a check (letter from L.W. Bray, Farmers Supply House, New Bern, North Carolina to Bragaw, dated December 5, 1940).

A more successful arrangement was that between Bragaw and his uncle, James Briggs, with T.H. Briggs & Sons in Raleigh. In one letter we glimpse the selling campaign,

would like to start our advertising campaign . . . about a week before you are scheduled to get here with the plants. Frankly we are having lots of calls for your stuff and if I can get all the dope a week in advance I believe that we can work up a selling campaign that will far exceed what we did last year. What I'd like to do is get your colored movies (titled if possible) showing various views of the plantation and the flowers. Also some stills of the house and whatever other views you have. These we could use in the

window and if the movies are good enough show them to the various garden clubs of the city along with other parties that do not belong to the garden clubs (letter from James Briggs, T.H. Briggs & Sons, Raleigh, NC to Bragaw, dated February 26, 1940).

Regardless of the ups and downs, Bragaw was always looking for other consignment opportunities,

This year we had a very large business, sending our azaleas on consignment to various towns in Eastern North Carolina, and if you would be interested, I would like for you to be our agent in Kinston next year. We can arrange the price to take care of any outside competition and I am sure it would be mutually beneficial if we could make such an arrangement. Judging by the amount we sold in other towns, I think you could easily sell \$600.00 to \$800.00 worth of azaleas during the blooming season (letter to Mrs. J.H. Carter, Kingston, NC from Bragaw, dated May 1, 1940).

As many advancements as Bragaw made, there were still problems – complaints about packing, delayed shipments, incorrect shipments, and damaged plants. While it is likely that some of these problems were the result of poorly trained workers, we suspect that another problem was Bragaw spreading himself too thin – being in charge of forestry operations, the gardens, the nursery, and agricultural activities. He, too, likely realized this since in 1939, prior to his buying trip out west, he made a local woman, Emma Lou Harrelson¹⁰, the nursery manager and gave her a

raise. We have only one letter surviving from her to Bragaw during his trip,

The only thing that is bothering me now is that something is eating up the buds that have started opening. They start in at the apex and eat all of the petals off. I'm almost sure that it is some kind of a worm but haven't been able to locate one yet. I'm watching them very close though. What about using some poison on them? My books says that any poison that won't injure the plant will kill them.

... I sold \$58.80 in azaleas this week Mr. Varzaal and took a check for them. Stop fussing – he made it a personal check and I called the bank and found it to be good and cashed it the next morning. Mr. Gaylor banked it to the nursery so wasn't that nice? . . .

I've been potting plants today. Do you know that over a hundred of the Camellias in the hot-house that had such harsh treatment have nice roots on them and that most of the others that lived are calloused nicely? I've filled the new bed that Alex built with the stuff that you told me [to] and now the others that you ordered are here, so Alex had to build

Department. She was the daughter of Isham D. Harrelson, 63, the proprietor of a retail grocery. Both were living on Marsh Branch Road – the same road that Bragaw lived on. In that year he was identified as the Orton Manager. Her father died in 1945 in Southport. She went on to marry Donald Kistler and serve in the United States Navy Reserves as a Pharmacist Mate, 3rd Class. After the war she ran a florist's shop in Arlington, Virginia. She died in 1966 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

¹⁰ The 1940 census identifies Emma Lou Harrelson as 23, single, white, and the manager of the Nursery

another bed. I will put the roses and quince in it too. . . . The other cuttings in the new beds have started rooting and all of them are calloused. We should get about 80 or 90% there. We've had lots of trouble keeping them drained but haven't lost but a few. The hot-house is almost empty but there are a few hundred newly potted plants that I don't think can standing moving just yet. I've mossed about 20 camellias and they are going fine.

....

The Darkies and I think that you have been away quite long enough and won't you please cut your trip short as Jake is afraid he will have to go to war before you get back and he won't get in your division. He and Clarence and Herman say that they won't go without you 'cause they are used to following you. I'm teaching Lillian to be a flower girl. She is my shadow from morning till evening and now call's me her sister. She vows she isn't black (letter from Emma Lou Harrelson to Bragaw, October 2, 1939).

The letter confirms that at least one heated greenhouse (a hothouse) was in existence by 1939 as we suspected. It also indicates that by 1939 some of the African American workers included Queen (Delts), Jake (Kelly), Clarence (Jones), Herman (Ellis), and Lillian (Jones). The Alex mentioned as building beds was Alex Bogie.¹¹

¹¹ James Alexander Bogie, Jr. was born on May 20, 1910, the son of James and Martha Bogie. His father was identified in the 1930 census as 57 years old and a watchman in the menhaden factory south of Orton. Alex married Jane C. Blackburn (known as Janie) about 1936. By October 1939 he was working at Orton and in the 1940 federal census was identified as the Assistant Manager of Orton. He was working about 60 hours a

The Sprunt family suffered the tragic death of Sam Nash, the brother of Annie Gray Nash, Laurence's wife. Sam Nash was a gardener, landscaper, and nursery owner in Tarboro, North Carolina. On November 27, 1940, he was involved in a traffic accident, dying the following day. The decision was made for Orton to "take charge of his [Nash's] nursery and carry it on for Mrs. Nash" (letter to Mrs. Joseph Knapp, Knotts Island, North Carolina from Bragaw, dated December 4, 1940). Bragaw sent Emma Lou Harrelson up to Tarboro where for at least several months she operated the business. It is uncertain when the nursery was finally closed.

It was as a result of this that Bragaw first corresponded directly with Charles F. Gillette, a landscape architect in Richmond, Virginia with whom Nash was working. Bragaw explained that they would be taking over Nash's obligations and then he mentioned that he had seen "some excellent examples of your work" (letter to Dr. Charles F. Gillette, Richmond, Virginia from Bragaw, dated December 12, 1940).

Another individual who appears in the nursery records in 1940 and 1941 was R.K. Godfrey. Knott and her colleagues (2014:57) identify Robert K. Godfrey (1911-2000) as a teaching fellow in the botany department at North Carolina State College and later at Florida State University. They fail, however, to explain his tenure at Orton. Godfrey's obituary from the *American Society of Plant Taxonomists Newsletter* notes only "a brief period in the early 1940s as horticulturist/gardener at the Orton Plantation near Wilmington, N.C" after obtaining a second master's at Harvard (Kral 2001). He served in the Navy during WWII, but afterwards returned to Orton, marrying Eleanor Niernsee of Southport. At some point he went to North Carolina State College, obtaining his doctorate. It is unfortunate that we don't know more about his work at Orton.

By 1940 Bragaw had his mind set on

week, with a yearly pay of \$750. Alex's wife began working at Orton about 1968. He continued working at Orton into the late 1980s and died in 1989.

writing a book that would deal with the nomenclature problems he observed with camellias. His seriousness impressed other nurserymen, including George F. Peterson of Linda Nursery, who wrote,

am greatly impressed with your ambition with reference to writing a book on camellias. I am sure such a book would be very valuable and save us a lot of headaches in identifying camellias (letter from George F. Peterson, Chico, CA to Bragaw, dated September 18, 1940).

Bragaw went on to visit Washington, D.C. where he reviewed literature at the Library of Congress and the Department of Agriculture Library. He also corresponded with the Massachusetts Horticultural Society in Boston and the Camellia Society of America in Macon, Georgia, which he subsequently joined.

Bragaw wrote Peterson explaining that while he realized the responsibility such a project involved, he hoped “to have it written by the end of next Summer” (letter from Bragaw to George F. Peterson, Chico, California, dated October 10, 1940).

He learned that others were attempting the same thing. In writings to Mrs. Norman Mansfield, he told her that Orton by 1940 had 350 varieties, although many were similar to one another. She responded,

I have been trying to catalogue each camellia with a full description of each camellia and listing all the names that camellia is know by. I find, checking back, that the majority of camellias have from two to seven names. The Laurel Lead, which is so scarce down here, and the El Kemendo, which is so plentiful in California, are exactly the same thing (letter from Mrs. Norman

Mansfield, New Orleans, LA to Bragaw, dated May 4, 1940).

Bragaw then began corresponding with Major Newell F. Vanderbilt of St. Helena, California who had also begun efforts to eliminate duplicate names. Vanderbilt explained that “from some 1277 names in trade [I] have worked down to several hundred duplicates and others plainly so from descriptions, and have around 700 for a start” (letter from Newell F. Vanderbilt, St. Helena, California to Bragaw, dated October 23, 1940).

The only Vanderbilt publication that appears to have survived is entitled, *Camellia Research II: Census 1940-41, Trade Varieties*. We have been unable to identify a surviving copy of Vanderbilt’s *Camellia Research I*, although it is briefly described on the flyleaf of the surviving publication. This document presented 588 varieties then in trade with their 333 synonyms. He also listed an additional 425 names, largely Japanese names, with their 25 synonyms. Vanderbilt was to publish “Issue No. 3” that he promised would be “the final factual variety name, synonym if any, and accepted descriptions data.” We have been unable to document whether this was ever accomplished.

In addition to buying and selling plants, Bragaw’s correspondence also provides a glimpse of their efforts to license a particular plant. Probably through Bragaw’s contacts with the camellia shows in Virginia, Bragaw became aware of Mary Bell Glennan and her prize winning camellia.¹² Bragaw sought some arrangement

¹² Glennan identified the “variety which has been named for me” as probably “a sport of Gigantea,” noting that it had won a variety of awards (Glennan 1946:61). In 1948 it was reported that the flower had a more brilliant cherry-red color than Gigantea and the white markings were more pronounced. Of special interest, “during a severe freeze of seven degrees above zero, the tight buds of the great majority of camellias at Orton Garden (including GIGANTEA) were completely ruined, but there was no injury to MARY BELL GLENNAN” (Anonymous 1948:15). Otherwise Savage (1993:M-11) identifies it as a synobym for Gigantea, with

whereby Orton would be allowed to propagate and sell this particular flower. Bringing Sprunt into the discussions, Bragaw wrote,

I have talked the matter over with Mr. Sprunt and while he would still be glad to handle the propagating of the plan on a partnership basis of 50% from the cuttings and 25% from the grafts, he does not want to tie up any large amount of money in the propagating rights at present. As I told you when I was in Norfolk, I think we could handle the propagation rights for the plan on a partnership basis that would be entirely satisfactory to you, and I feel sure that you would realize more from it than from outright sale of the cuttings. However, if you and your brother do decide, as he was talking when I was there, to sell the cuttings at so much per cutting to as many different nurserymen as would care to buy them, we would very much like to get some of them at that time (letter to Miss Mary Bell Glennan from Bragaw, dated May 5, 1941).

Subsequently Miss Glennan had her attorney draft an agreement, based on splitting the proceeds of grafts taken from her plant. While the files contain notes, presumably made by Sprunt, on the agreement there is no indication that any agreement was ever reached.

Bragaw never lost his interest in continuing his education. In 1939 he exchanged correspondence regarding the use of sulfur to treat "azalea flower spot," today known as *Ovulinia* petal blight, caused by the fungus *Ovulinia azaleae*. In 1940 he also worked

extensively with R.W. Leiby¹³ at Cornell University on new pesticides containing rotenone.¹⁴

Bragaw was also concerned about the possibility of *Phomopsis* twig blight (*Phomopsis* sp.), a serious disease of well-established azaleas, most commonly affecting *Indica* cultivars. Infected twigs first show wilting and death of leaves and defoliation on one or more branches. The disease is worse after heat or drought stress and fungicides are of little value. Today control is achieved by removing the infected branches and disinfecting shears with alcohol.

Plants were not the only business in which Orton was engaged. There isn't a great deal of evidence for the sale of cut flowers in 1939, although by 1940 Bragaw wrote, "we have been very much rushed both with the nursery business and the daffodils. Day before yesterday we cut over 6,000 dozen" (letter to H.L. Sisk, Darlington, SC from Bragaw, dated March 21, 1940). We learn in other correspondence that Orton was receiving .25¢ per dozen daffodils – so the 6,000 dozen generated perhaps \$1,500 or \$25,000 in 2015\$. Although little survives, there is evidence that shipments were going out to "Savoy" and "Blackistone." The latter was certainly Zachariah Blackistone, Sr. of Blackistone Florists, Inc., Washington, D.C.

By 1941 the price reported by Bragaw in correspondence was "15 to 35¢ per dozen in lots

¹³ Leiby was the assistant state entomologist for ten years and state entomologist for twelve years in North Carolina, taking a position as extension assistant professor of entomology at Cornell University in 1937.

¹⁴ Rotenone is produced by extraction from the roots and stems of several tropical and subtropical plant species. It is an unselective organic pesticide that is also very toxic to fish. Rotenone is today classified by the World Health Organization as a moderately hazardous. Because of possible links to Parkinson's Disease-like symptoms the companies distributing and selling rotenone products voluntarily cancelled all food use registrations for it, except for piscicide (fish kill) uses. Since then, the EPA only supports registration for piscicidal purposes.

orthographic variations of "Mary Belle Glennan," "Mary Glennan," "Mary Belle Glennen," and "Mary Belle Brennan."

of 25 dozen or more" (letter to Mrs. Roby Robinson, Atlanta, Georgia from Bragaw, dated February 4, 1941). Unfortunately this price appears not to have held, causing considerable ire on the part of Sprunt who received the news in a telephone call from one of the major daffodil distributors on the East Coast. In response they wrote,

we sincerely regret that the price we told you we were getting for Sir Watkins and King Alfreds did not meet with your approval. We cannot understand how you can be getting better prices than the ones we told you as New York and Philadelphia are both getting the same prices on Daffodils We feel that from 6 to 8 cents on a Sir Watkins Daffodil is a fair price as these flowers are very small and it is hard for a Retailer to sell these Daffodils at a profit if they are forced to pay more; also the price from 15 to 20 cents on King Alfreds is a fair price as it is possible to 20 cents a dozen selling these in small quantities but if any Retailer buys 100 dozen or more, he will not pay more than 10 cents a dozen (letter from J.J. Kelly, Callnon Brothers Wholesale Florists, Philadelphia to J.L. Sprunt, dated March 19, 1941).

Orton continued to have problems with their shipment of camellias. A wholesale florist in New York complained,

another shipment made on December 18 consisting of one dozen camellias on which we sent you a report that they had arrived all broken or bruised. I call in the Inspector for the Railway Express Agency and he notified us that there wouldn't be any use to put in a claim on the

shipment as they were so poorly packed. After your first shipment we notified you to the effect that your camellias had arrived in poor condition, touched by frost and that should be packed in cotton and wrapped well to keep from freezing, but your next shipment arrived in even worse condition. We are sorry that this happened especially since Mr. H. VanNess recommended us to you, but camellias are a very delicate flower and have to be well taken care of in packing (letter from Joseph A. Millang, Inc., New York to Bragaw, dated April 5, 1940).

Nevertheless, Orton continued this business and in 1941 Bragaw reported that,

camellias this year are \$4.00 per dozen instead of \$3.00, mostly due to an improvement in the method of packing over that of last year (letter to Mr. Walter D. Popham, Greenwood, South Carolina from Bragaw, dated March 10, 1941).

In another letter Bragaw stated that they were receiving from \$4.00 to \$6.00 per dozen "depending on the size and variety." In addition he explained that, "each flower is wired to its stem for safety in transit and makes a nice corsage by itself" (letter to Mr. Willard L. Hutts, Millburn, New Jersey, dated April 29, 1941). Perhaps by this time Bragaw was refining the packing and shipping of camellias for better success.

In 1939 Bragaw received an order for 1½ tons of daffodil bulbs, "if they are above 12 cm. We find that the bulbs below this grade do not contain flowers" (letter from Hewett P. Mulford & Co., Lebanon, Ohio to Bragaw, dated October 10, 1939). Apparently Orton had only 800 to 1,000 pounds, so it is uncertain if a sale occurred.

The bulb business apparently did not go

as well as expected since in 1940 Bragaw explained that his bulbs were “not up to the standard I would like to have, so I am getting these bulbs from another grower” (letter to E.E. Biggs, Raleigh, North Carolina from Bragaw, dated September 24, 1940). He listed those bulbs he was able to sell, and their prices per dozen and per hundred:

Camperilla [Campernelle]	.50	4.00
King Alfred	1.00	8.00
White Pearl	.60	5.00
Helios	.85	7.50
Henry Ford	.85	7.50
John Evelyn ¹⁵	3.00	20.00
Elmira	.50	4.00
Laurens Koster	.75	5.00
Sir Watkins	.75	5.00
Dutch Iris	.50	3.50

By 1941 Bragaw wrote a prospective bulb purchaser, “we have been so rushed with various things that we have been unable to dig any bulbs and it does not look as though we will do so this season. I am referring your name and request to Mr. E.I. Tinga of Castle Hayne, North Carolina, who is a fellow-nurseryman of ours and carries a very complete line of bulbs” (letter to Mrs. D. Allen Smith, Newton Centre, Massachusetts from Bragaw, dated October 9, 1941). While Orton continued to offer cut daffodils, it appears that they got out of the bulb trade around this time.

It seems likely that the majority of the daffodils, either for cutting or bulbs, were planted either at Kendal or Lilliput where daffodils are still found in profusion.

Christmas greens continued to be shipped by Orton, although it doesn’t appear that they were a substantial part of the plantation’s revenue. A 1939 consignment effort by Sprunt went awry when the boxes were sold for \$1.50 each – express prepaid – instead of the \$2.00 that

had been agreed upon. Consequently, Orton received only \$1.10 to cover the box, greens, shipping, and labor.

Many orders didn’t come in until one or two weeks before Christmas, making the process very rushed. Another problem was that many individuals felt they could determine precisely what would go into the box, further complicating the process. An example is the letter requesting,

a box consisting of southern smilax, holly, mistletoe, a little yaupon and long leaf pine and some cones. Mrs. Hammer told me to remind you of the mistletoe as there wasn’t any in her box. I see in your letter that you make up these boxes at different prices – I would like a box at \$2.00 if that is possible, so perhaps you could give me less yaupon pine – I do like the smilax and want a good deal of that” (letter from Miss Jeanne Hatch, Rochester, New York to Bragaw, dated December 14, 1940).

By 1941 Bragaw had taken over the process from Sprunt and his letters indicate that he had significantly increased the price and worked to standardize what would be included,

Christmas boxes consist of long leaf pine, southern smilax, holly, mistletoe and a spray of magnolia leaves and a few pine cones, if desired. These boxes are \$3.50 a box F.O.B. the nursery, or \$4.00 prepaid to any express point (letter to John P. Stedman, Lumberton, North Carolina from Bragaw, dated December 18, 1941).

Another letter explained that the “pasteboard” boxes were 36 by 18-inches and contained a “very generous quantity.”

¹⁵ Still a very rare heirloom daffodil, it is difficult to acquire and retails today for about \$26/dozen. It is a large cupped gold and white scented flower that stands about 12 to 18-inches tall.

Orton also ventured into more exotic plants in 1940, when he had extensive correspondence with Fae Huttenlocher, the Associate Editor of *Better Homes and Gardens*. The magazine was producing its "Indoor Gardening Guide" and expressed an interest in Venus fly traps. Bragaw provided the magazine with several plants and instructions on their care. Apparently something was published since after this Orton would receive periodic interest in and requests for carnivorous plants.

1941 was unusual for several events at Orton. One was the plantation's involvement with G. Howard Hodge, one of the best known American milliners of the mid-twentieth century.¹⁶ Leon Wolf, with Krauss Co. in New Orleans convinced Hodge to design a line of hats featuring camellias,

some made of entirely artificial Camellias and others trimmed with Camellias. We have even had our braids and straw bodies dyed in the exact shades of the Camellias, so that the presentation will be perfect in every way. . . . We will need a lot of Camellias sent via air express to New York to be used for window displays and to be presented to customers" (letter from G. Howard Hodge, New York to Bragaw, dated February 27, 1941).

In response Bragaw offered camellias at \$3.00 a dozen.

Hodge wrote Bragaw about the preview

of his designs made to 125 fashion writers,

Four tables were arranged in the center upon which were shown heaps of artificial Camellias. The room was sprayed with a faint perfume to carry out the effect. We had an orchestra playing soft southern songs, two colored boys in white livery as bartenders, two colored "mammies" with colorful bandana head dress . . . each woman was presented with a fresh [Orton] Camellia and you should have heard them rave about the beauty of these flowers. We should have had twice as many, as a few of our guests were disappointed in not receiving a fresh Camellia Best & Co., Fifth Avenue, will present six windows of Camellia hats on Palm Sunday, April 6th. . . . I would like you to send me a description of the type of hat Mrs. Bragaw wears, head size, as I wish to send her with my compliments one of our Camellia hats (letter from G. Howard Hodge, New York to Bragaw, March 19, 1941).

Ultimately the promotion was extended to Hutzler Brothers in Baltimore; Best & Co., New York; Carson Piri Scott & Co. in Chicago; Julius Garfinkle & Co., Washington, D.C.; J.W. Robinson Co., Los Angeles; Woolf Brothers, Kansas City, Missouri; and Newman Millinery Co., Lansing, Michigan. While this was certainly not a huge money-maker for Orton, it did promote the plantation among the fashion elite.

For such a small staff and the extensive work in the nursery and gardens, the amount of publicity that Orton managed to generate is really nothing less than amazing. The State of North Carolina continued to provide support, primarily through Bill Sharpe, the News Bureau Manager with the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development. Both news

¹⁶ Born the son of a farmer, Hodge began a millinery factory in San Francisco after WWI, launching the Catalan hat line. By 1928 he had moved to New York City, establishing the company G. Howard Hodge Hats, Inc. He was chairman of the Millinery Quality Guild by 1937. National newspaper and fashion press coverage of his new styles started in 1928 and was extensive until 1963. Hodge died in 1966.

releases and even photographs of Orton were being sent out on a fairly regular basis in 1939. One press release was nearly as flowery as the gardens themselves, speaking of the copse of “patriarchal oaks, native holly and youpon [sic] . . . [the] long shaded walk winds past a reflecting lagoon back to Old King Roger Moore’s graveyard, a hallowed spot steeped in ancestral lore The gardens and entire plantation, with the exception of the Mansion, are open to the public. A charge of fifty cents per person is made for admission” (undated press release, “Orton Plantation Gardens in Full Bloom”). Other press releases were entitled, “Fall and Winter Events,” “Famous Old Plantation Gardens Open,” and “Over 350 varieties of Camellias to Bloom at Orton.”

Articles appearing in papers included, “Old South Will Reign Again at Famous Orton Plantation As Camellias Bloom!” (*Charlotte Observer*, December 17, 1939, pg. 16), “Camellias Lure Tourists to Carolina – Orton Plantation Offers Variety for Visitors” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 31, 1939), and “Historic Orton Gardens Nearing Azalea Season – Fine Old House One of State’s Glamorous Show Places” (*News & Observer*, March 5, 1939, pg. 2).

Because of the AP wire services many of Orton’s articles were picked up and repeated, further spreading Orton’s fame. One such article was “You Grab the Alligator – But Be Sure You Grab Him” which appeared in the *Fitchburg Sentinel* (Fitchburg, Massachusetts), the *Jefferson City (Missouri) Post-Tribune*, the *Emporia Gazette* (Emporia, Kansas), the *Paris News* (Paris, Texas), the *Evening Review* (East Liverpool, Ohio), and the *Hope Star* (Hope, Arkansas). Many of these out of the way places were introduced to Bragaw and Orton through the news campaign waged by a Forestry graduate.

Bragaw forged a strong relationship with the Carolina Auto Club, periodically advertising in *The Car Owner*. This also appears to have lead to advertising in the *Southern Holiday* magazine published by the New York Automobile Club.

There were also periodic notices in local

papers about Bragaw talking to one club or another. He even provided promotional talks for those firms selling Orton plants on consignment. Bragaw also developed relationships with reporters across the state, dutifully answering letters asking what was “new” at Orton. For example, in one letter he explained,

We have progressed very nicely with our experimental plants at Orton and have quite a few plants coming along fine that have never been very widely grown in the East. The *Accacia Baleyana* [*Acacia baileyana* or Cootamundra wattle] and *Eucalyptus* [*Eucalyptus spp.* or gum tree], both of which are very interesting plants, have done exceptionally well even after the very severe Winter which we experienced last year. Of course these new and exotic plants are merely to supply the interest at Orton. The camellias and azaleas are still the main feature of the garden. The purpose of bringing in these new plants is to fill in gaps in our blooming days and also add new interest by their varied foliage and flowers (letter to Miss Carolyn Lehman Goldberg, *Herald-Sun*, Durham, North Carolina from Bragaw, dated December 7, 1940).

In another case, when given publicity by *Holland’s Magazine*, Bragaw wrote the editor, “I am enclosing one of the many postcards which I have received lately in regard to your magazine Thought you might like to see a sample of what we have been getting from the picture of Orton on the front of your magazine” (letter to *Holland’s Magazine*, Dallas, Texas from Bragaw, dated September 11, 1941).

In 1941 there was a brief mention of Orton in their *Where to Eat, Sleep, and Play in the U.S.A.* (Traveler’s Windfall Association 1941: 455).

That prompted Bragaw to write, "We appreciate very much the kind things that your publication said about Orton, and we are always glad to have your friends visit our Gardens If you will give your name at the gate and tell them that you wish to see the manager, that will be all the pass necessary" (letter to Miss Hilda Robbins, The Traveler's Windfall Association, Inc., Bronxville, New York from Bragaw, dated May 8, 1941).

By 1940 Bragaw also began an intensive newspaper campaign advertising Orton and promoting the best flowering season. Ads were submitted on March 6, April 4, and April 16, and April 17 to 34 different newspapers across North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Bragaw also advertised in *Southern Life* and in the Wrightsville Beach Board of Trade magazine placed in cottage vacation homes.

For the first time, Orton began using billboards in 1941 to advertise the gardens to travelers on U.S. 17, S.C. 61, and other locations receiving heavy tourist traffic. Another first was the consideration given to the production of post cards for Orton (letter from K.S. Tanner, Jr., Importer, Rutherfordton, North Carolina to Bragaw, dated May 11, 1940).. Whether the production was finalized is unknown, although there certainly are a variety of early Orton post cards.

Perhaps the biggest event, however, was when *Life* magazine visited Orton to record the Christmas party. The visit was orchestrated, or at least suggested, by a letter from R.K. Godfrey, while he was at Harvard, apparently after working at Orton,

In the lower Cape Fear section of coastal North Carolina is located one of the finer examples of old southern plantations, Orton. Orton Plantation is a very active year-round establishment, not just the hunting preserve of a wealthy sportsman. It constitutes some 15,000 acres upon which the major functions are

represented by the maintenance of extensive gardens of camellias and azaleas which are planted about the mansion, a peerless example of ante-bellum southern architecture dating back to 1725, by various forestry operations on the large tracts of timber, a fresh water lake some eight miles long, in addition to the forest preserves, by the operations of a wholesale and retail plant nursery, and by the general farming necessary for the growing of vegetables and crops for the inhabitants and livestock. The labor upon which the owner of Orton, Mr. J.L. Sprunt, and his manager, Mr. H. Churchill Bragaw, depend is chiefly colored. Hence dozens of the typical happy-go-lucky darkies of plantation fame live scattered about over the plantation in the usual negro cabins. Each year on Christmas eve about two hundred of them assemble at a Christmas tree where Mr. Bragaw gives them a party. It is an annual celebration of local fame, considerable in its proportions, and unique in character.

I urge you to investigate the possibilities of your sending reporters and photographers to their Christmas Party. . . . I shall probably be reached at Winnabow, North Carolina for the remainder of the winter. . . . (letter to Henry Luce, *Life* magazine, from Robert K. Godfrey, no date).

Life's Suggestion Department expressed an interest, wanting to know more. Bragaw responded,

The party is held each Christmas

Eve at Orton Plantation The party usually starts in the early afternoon with such sports as chasing a greased pig and climbing slick poles, singing, and other impromptu sports, which the darkies originate. Earlier in the day, pigs are barbequed for the barbeque later on in the evening. We never know just exactly how many guests we will have, but it will run around 200 or better, the guests being from two week old on up to the middle nineties. The whole proceeding is held out of doors with a natural settings of huge live oak trees and hollies and the camellia garden. About dark, the huge bonfire is lit and all the darkies gather around and sing Christmas carols and other negro spirituals and then come up one by one to get their Christmas gift. All in all, it is a very delightful affair and our friends who have attended in the past have all had a very enjoyable time (letter to Miss Charlotte Case, *Life* magazine, from Bragaw, dated November 23, 1940).

A follow-up letter added more detail,

Since I have been at Orton, we have given the colored people a Christmas party each year, usually on Christmas Eve. We have a large Christmas tree and presents for all the colored people who work on the plantation. We also give them at that time the usual Christmas confectioneries, such as fruit, hard candy, nuts, etc. The colored people enjoy this part a great deal, because, as you know, any opportunity which offers itself for celebration is immediately

seized upon by this happy-go-lucky people. The party is really in two parts, for we usually have guests down for the day and have a deer hunt on the plantation. There are a great many deer roaming through the woods and the hunt is usually very successful. Then again, after the Christmas tree at night, quite often there are many who like a good old-fashioned coon hunt, so this is always staged and with certain results, for the place abounds with coons and opossums. The colored folks are always ready to go on a coon or opossum hunt, because "possums" and "tatoes" are as dear to the heart of a Negro as tea is to an Englishman. This year, we plan to start early in the morning with a deer hunt on the plantation, then in the afternoon, we will have various rural sports for the colored people, such as chasing a greased pig, climbing a slick pole and wrestling and scrambling for pennies, and probably riding a yearling bull. Also early in the day, one of the darkies, who has quite a reputation for the best barbeque in this part of the country, will begin to barbeque several pigs to be eaten by the colored people and other guests. The colored folks will all gather at the Christmas tree at about dusk and will spend some time singing Christmas hymns and Negro spirituals and probably engage in a few impromptu acts, which they get up themselves. After this, the colored folks go to the plantation church and have a church service and a good old-fashioned "preaching". After having cleansed their souls, they

are then ready for a big coon hunt. . . . (letter to Miss Charlotte Case, *Life* magazine, from Bragaw, dated December 13, 1940).

We know that a *Life* photographer, Eliot Elisofon did visit Orton with the anticipation that an article would appear (see, for example, a report of the visit, "Life Cameraman Takes Pictures of Party at Orton – Scenes at Plantation Christmas Party to Appear in Magazine," *The Robesonian*, December 31, 1940, pg. 6). Nevertheless, the article was never published. Only 24 photographs of the event were taken by Elisofon and today they are curated at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

It appears that the Christmas event probably began in 1939, perhaps 1938 and continued until at least 1950 according to Mollycheck (2015:15).

Susan Taylor Block's interview with Orton gardener Clarence Jones suggests that Christmas gifts were elaborate during the plantation's ownership by James Sprunt (who died in 1924, when Clarence was 16 years old),

Sent his workmen to these fruit stands, grocery stores and everywhere to buy up just tons of all kinds of things: meat, lard, flour, rice, meat. And he'd have a barrel, a little barrel . . . and he'd pack those barrels just as long as he could put something in it. Then he'd put fruit on top and cover it over with a burlap and put a hoop on it and then all his employees would get a barrel (Clarence Jones interview by Susan Taylor Block, October 15, 1999).

By the time of James Laurence Sprunt the distribution was still taking place, although it was less extravagant. The Sprunt Person Accounts for December 21, 1935 documents fruits, etc. in the

amount of \$30. The next mention, December 22, 1938 was specifically identified as "Christmas distribution" in the amount of \$68.00. While this seems like a minor amount, in 2015\$ this would have been over \$1,100, which could purchase a fair amount of fruit and other items.

In 1941, because of surviving invoices, we know that the Christmas distribution involved 5 bushels of nuts, 1,000 oranges, 75 pounds of mixed nuts, three boxes of raisins, grapes, and 250 pounds of candy. Barrels were replaced by paper bags, which were also purchased for the distribution (Currin Wholesale Co. receipt dated December 23, 1941). In 1943 we have been able to document two boxes of mixed nuts from Brooks Cash Grocery, Wilmington; and two boxes of oranges, two bushels of winesap apples, and two boxes of tangerines from W.H. McEachern's Sons, also in Wilmington.

Although we have less detail, the Christmas packages, or bags, for employees in 1968 cost \$55.16. In 1969 the cost was \$45.48 and included both fruit and nuts. Similar charges are found through at least 1973.

Agriculture

Under the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936, Congress first authorized the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) to provide cost-sharing for soil and water conservation through the Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP). Under this program, the Federal Government shared costs with farmers to assist them in carrying out soil-building and soil and water-conserving practices. We are fortunate to have a copy of Orton's 1939 "Farm Plan," prepared by the U.S.D.A. Agricultural Adjustment Administration. It indicates that while 15,000 acres were in the farm, "noncrop land other than pasture" amounted to 14,960.5 acres, resulting in only 39.5 acres of cropland. There were no special crops, such as tobacco, wheat, cotton, potatoes, peanuts, or commercial vegetables. The outlined plan called for,

Table 4.
Agricultural Seeds and Plants Purchased in 1941

Plant or Seed	Scientific Name	Quantity Purchased	Likely Area Planted
Cabbage collards	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	6,000 plants	½ acre
Collards	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	8,000 plants	4 acres
Imperial purple top white globe turnips	<i>Brassica rapa</i>	¼ pound seeds	1 acre
Scotch kale [Scots kale], curley leaved	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	¼ pound seeds	½ acre
Southern Giant curled mustard	<i>Brassica juncea</i>	¼ pound seeds	3 acres
Moss curled parsley	<i>Petroselinum crispum</i>	1 packet	
Cow peas	<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>	10 bushels seed	3 acres
Abruzzi rye	<i>Secale cereal</i>	6 bushels	2.5 acres
Austrian winter peas	<i>Pisum arvense</i>	200 pounds	2 acres
Hairy vetch	<i>Vicia villosa</i>	200 pounds	5 acres
Italian rye grass	<i>Lolium multiflorum</i>	2,200 pounds	55+ acres

Rye (turned) Austrian winter peas 30a
 Corn & conifers 13a
 Field peas 4a
 Bulbs and field peas 8a

By 1941 the surviving records provide a much fuller list of seeds and plants purchased, although even it does not appear complete. The items documented are shown in Table 4.

If the plan were followed the maximum reimbursement for which Orton would be eligible was \$27.65. Thus, the motivation for compliance was likely more associated with sound management than with any financial return.

While we don't have similar paperwork for the following year, there is a surviving Notice of Farm Acreage Allotment and Marketing Quota for Flue-Cured Tobacco. In this Orton received an allotment of 1.2 acres in 1940 for tobacco. Although we can't document tobacco being planted in 1940, there is good evidence that it was planted in 1942 and 1943.

Otherwise the only agricultural activity that is documented for 1940 is the purchase of small quantities of seeds, likely for the use of Orton's workers. Purchased were 4 pounds of red onion sets (*Allium cepa*), sufficient for about two 100-foot rows; 1 pound of Truckers Favorite corn (*Zea maize*), sufficient for about a 700 foot row; two packets of watermelon seeds (*Citrullus lanatus*), and two packets of Bountiful beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*). Since packet sizes vary, it isn't possible to estimate the area planted, but generally packets would be used in individual gardens.

Some of the items, such as the collards, turnips, kale, mustard, and parsley were likely intended for home gardens. The quantities suggest that at least some were for the African American workers at Orton. The remaining items, except perhaps the Italian rye, were likely associated with Orton's farm plan, being planted for soil conservation purposes. The Italian rye grass was acquired in very large quantities and it may have been used to plant Orton's lawns in and around the gardens, providing color and holding the soil. Sturtevant recommended grass and at least one letter indicates that it was planted, "the green grass up front of the house certainly shows off the house to much better advantage" (letter from Pauline Newsom, North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Raleigh, North Carolina to Bragaw, dated April 9, 1940).

Even as late as 1940, however, Bragaw was still trying to get soils stabilized at Orton, with at least five samples being sent to Raleigh for testing. One soil, identified as for camellias, came back with a pH of 6.5; the other soil samples from unspecified locations, revealed very high acidity, with pH levels from 2.5 to 4.8.

Other farm-related activities were

diverting Bragaw's attention from the gardens. For example in 1940, Bragaw was given affidavits regarding the wedding of George and Maggie McCoy, workers on Orton. George had died and Maggie was filing for social security, but needed proof of her marriage. Bragaw responded,

When your husband was buried, I stood the bill for his funeral expenses, which amounted to \$90.00. If you will have a paper drawn up agreeing to pay the \$90.00, so I will not take a loss, I will see that the affidavits are properly signed and mailed down to you at once (letter to Mrs. George McCoy from Bragaw, dated October 22, 1940).

In other plantation business, Bragaw wrote requesting additional information on privy construction, receiving a response,

We do not have a bulletin at the present time covering the type of outdoor privy that you mention. However, I am sending your letter on to our District Supervisor in this district with the request that he call upon you as soon as possible and take this matter up with you. At the present time we have WPA Community Sanitation project operating in New Hanover County and Mr. Scott will no doubt be able to get these built for you without any labor cost (letter from B.L. Jessup, State Director, Community Sanitation, U.S. Public Health Service, Raleigh, North Carolina, to Bragaw, dated January 31, 1939).¹⁷

¹⁷ Nearly 59,000 pit privies were constructed in North Carolina in cooperation with the Work Projects Administration and the U. S. Public Health Service, with over 14,000 being constructed in the program's last

Forestry

The Forest Protective Associations were still active and required much of Bragaw's attention. In 1940 he wrote asking when the firelanes would be plowed, but also about the tractor,

Mr. Lattay was speaking at one time of having some outsider buy a tractor and have the association rent it from him. Did he ever do anything further about this matter? The last time the caterpillar was used at Orton one of the connecting rods came aloose and knocked a hole in the base. This can be repaired without a great deal of trouble, but it hardly seems worth while, as the tractor seems to be completely worn out in every respect (letter to W.A. McCormick, Department of Conservation and Development, Raleigh, North Carolina from Bragaw, dated October 23, 1940).

The tractor was still an issue in 1941 when Bragaw was informed by the State that they were "absolutely opposed to" the repair of the "old Orton Tractor" since it was "not worth repairing" and that the damage was the result of pulling stumps, not plowing the fire lanes. Their assessment was summed up, "when a piece of equipment has been used and abused as much as that tractor has its life is ended" (letter from W.C. McCormick, Chief Forest Fire Control, Raleigh, North Carolina to Bragaw, dated January 2, 1941).

This didn't sit well with Bragaw, who complained about the lack of plowing and fire danger. Shortly thereafter Bragaw and Sprunt took it upon themselves to repair the tractor using Orton funds, at a cost of \$3,209 (January 20, 1941 invoice from Carolina Tractor & Equipment Co.,

year of operation, July, 1940, to July, 1941 (Reynolds 1942:144).

Salisbury, North Carolina).

There was at least one fire on Orton, although Bragaw explained, "we had it stopped before it got all the way to the gardens – it only came as far as St. Philip's Church" (letter to E.E. Briggs, from Bragaw, dated April 21, 1941).

Orton developed a significant pulpwood program, under the supervision of Bragaw's college class-mate, Charlie Fox.¹⁸ Those operations may have taken a significant hit in 1940 when the nation's Wage and Hour law¹⁹ caught up with Orton and Bragaw wrote to the U.S. Department of Labor,

I manage a large, old run-down rice plantation for Mr. Laurence Sprunt. . . . We have 15,000 acres of forest land, marsh land, farming land and numerous ponds and lakes. We have a nursery and a farm and a commercial garden, the garden having only been open to the public for the past years. On these extensive holds, we have a great many colored people, who are hangers-on of the slave days. As you no doubt know, there is no industry that could employ these people in Brunswick County and we are faced with the problem of giving them enough work to keep them in food. . . . In

order to give more work to the numerous darkies, I have started a forest improvement program on the plantation, which consists of first going through and taking out the trees that are fit for poles and piling; then, diseased trees for pulpwood. The lumbering operations and logging operations are carried on separately from the rest of this work by another person, who has his own payroll and pays the standard wage and hour rate. However, in cutting the pulpwood, I have been paying on a piece basis which is in line with what the pulpwood operators pay, who adhere to the Wage and Hour rate. By doing this, I am able to give the aged and infirm, as well as the able-bodied, darkies something to do. Some of them are able to make \$12.00 and \$15.00 per week and others only \$3.00 or \$4.00. Now the question is whether I am right in assuming that this operation does not come under the scope of the Wage and House Law (letter to A.J. Fletcher, U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, dated September 5, 1940).

Not satisfied with the response that his activities were covered under the minimum wage, Bragaw again wrote,

I am not quite satisfied that our operations would be covered by the section which you quote from. The work that we are doing is classified by the Soil Conservation Program as "timber stand improvement", and we are given credit on our AAA Program by units of soil building practice just as if we were to plant peas

¹⁸ Charles Alexander Fox was born on October 14, 1913. His father, Charles M. Fox, was a druggist in Asheboro, North Carolina. Fox, often called Charlie, attended North Carolina State with Bragaw, earning a degree in Forestry. After Orton he went on to work as a forester with the North Carolina Forestry Service, marrying Evelyn Loughlin. He died in Athens, Tennessee on December 7, 2000.

¹⁹ Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA) was signed into law on June 25, 1938. Affecting only about one-fifth of the labor force, it banned oppressive child labor and set the minimum hourly wage at 25¢ an hour and the maximum workweek at 44 hours. In 1939 the minimum wage was increased to 30¢ an hour.

and plant [plow] them under. In thinning these timber stands quite often the amount of pulpwood removed is so negligible that it does not even pay to remove it, but we do it from a timber stand improvement viewpoint. This practice is definitely a subordinate part of our farming activities. . . . I am very anxious to get this matter straightened out, because if we do come under the Wage and Hour Division I will have to do away with a good many of my local laborers and bring in those from outside who work nothing but pulpwood and can thus make their 30¢ per hour wage (letter to A.L. Fletcher, Regional Director, US Dept. of Labor, Wage and Hour Division from Bragaw, dated September 18, 1940).

Likely used to getting such letters from disgruntled employers, Fletcher responded tersely, "in our letter of September 11, 1940, we gave you our opinion on your pulpwood operations. We felt then that they were subject to the coverage of the Fair Labor Standards Act and we still are of the same opinion," suggesting that if Mr. Sprunt desired, he could seek a judicial ruling.

We don't know whether Bragaw's pulpwood activities were terminated, but we do have ample evidence to suggest that a variety of logging activities continued at Orton.

For example, in one letter we learn that Orton was operating its own saw mill and cutting a variety of pine and cypress lumber,

I went down to Mr. Sprunt's plantation. . . and checked over the cypress and pine lumber which is piled up and scattered around near the residence but I did not go out to the saw mill, as

your Mr. Alex Fox [C.A. Fox] said you would be back in a day or so but if I would send you a list of the lumber I needed that you would advise me how much of the same you had on hand ready for delivery and if you would be able to cut the balance, and also quote me a price per 1999 ft B.M. [followed by dimensional cypress lumber, rough and weather boarding - pine or cypress - dressed; also asked about tongue and groove] (letter from C.D. Maffitt, Maffitt's Supply Co., Wilmington to Bragaw, dated October 3, 1940).

We don't know the outcome of this exchange, but in another letter by Bragaw to Maffitt, he explains,

shortly after Mr. Sprunt told you about the cypress lumber, we launched a building program which used the balance of what we had. At present we have no cypress on hand and probably will not be cutting any except for our own needs for quite some time. However, we are cutting some very nice grade structural heart long leaf pipe. If you would be interested in any of this, we can cut it in practically any dimension you want up to 24 feet (letter to Maffitt Supply Co., Wilmington from Bragaw, dated September 2, 1941).

In other letters we learn that Orton was supplying wood for the shipyard being built in Wilmington, as well as cord wood for an Army field baker supporting training in the vicinity (letter to James W. Clarke, San Jose, California). Bragaw also declined to sell any dogwood timber²⁰ from Orton lands (letter to Joe D. Cox &

²⁰ Dogwood timber is very hard and dense, making it preferred for items such as looms shuttles, spools,

Sons, High Point, North Carolina from Bragaw, dated July 28, 1941).

Bragaw continued to restock the Orton forests, releasing 200 quail in 1941. He sought recommendations for quail foods that would not be entirely eaten by deer, being told that items such as "Sesbanania, sericea and annial lespedeza, small grains, vetches, sugar and grain sorghums, especially milo maize" were the best options (letter from J.W. Kistler, North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development, Division of Game and Inland Fisheries to R.K. Godfrey, dated February 8, 1941).

Bragaw was even responsible for Orton Pond. He wrote to several parties wanting to fish that the rate was \$5 for one man and a boat with a guide or \$8 for two men, and \$10 for three men (letter to Joe Austing, Jr., Four Oaks, North Carolina, dated June 12, 1941). With this came the responsibility for keeping the lake weed free and in 1939 Sprunt, seeing an advertisement for a "weed saw," sent it to Bragaw with the note, "Get it + use in Coves."

Bragaw also wrote in 1941 urging that the state's game wardens watching over the Orton area be given higher pay, observing, "I am amazed at the amount of work they do on the small salary which they receive" comparing their pay to the \$4.50/day pay given common labor in the area (letter to Hinton James, Commissioner of the Department of Conservation and Development, Raleigh from Bragaw, dated October 24, 1941).

While River Road had been "improved" by this time, increasing tourist traffic, Bragaw was still writing to encourage that it be paved,

this road is becoming very important with the farmers in that section, as they grow a great deal of truck which necessitates a great many trips to and from the Wilmington market and there is also a great deal of tourist traffic

(letter to T.T. Betts, Highway Commission, Fayetteville, North Carolina from Bragaw, dated June 10, 1941).

Plantation Purchases

In 1941 the nursery records include a small number of invoices from 18 separate merchants. These provide a rare glimpse into plantation activities and will be briefly discussed.

From the Caterpillar sales and service Carolina Tractor & Equipment Co. there is one invoice for the repair of Orton's Caterpillar 22 tractor, previously discussed under forestry operations. The repairs included a rod assembly, piston, and rings, as well as other minor expenses.

Samuel Bear, Sr. & Sons in Wilmington, a wholesale grocer provided unspecified food for Orton.

The Wilmington firm of E.W. Godwin's Sons, specializing in lumber and building materials, sold Orton dressed wood and wire springs.

R.H. Hall, a Wilmington feed and flour dealer sold Orton quantities of animal feed, including dog food, cow feed, rock salt, hen feed, and scratch.²¹

The motto for Hyman Supply Co. in Wilmington was "Everything for the Mill" and the firm carried a large range of mill and machinery items. Orton acquired a range of materials from them, including at least five categories.

A variety of paints and related materials were obtained, including raw linseed oil²², white

²¹ While the distinction between hen feed and scratch is not entirely clear, scratch is generally a mixture of maize, wheat, barley, sorghum and milling by-products.

²² Because raw linseed oil dries very slowly it is often limited to preservative use on items such as the insides of wood gutters, chopping blocks, sawhorses, and other items exposed to the elements where drying time is not a consideration. It may, however, be used in oil-based paints where slow drying allows the paint to "level"

bobbin heads, mallet heads, jewelers' blocks, and even machinery bearings (Panshin and de Zeeuw 1970:617).

yacht paint, red ship copper paint²³, green porch and deck paint, 20 pounds of white lead, white sani flat paint, turpentine, and paint brushes.

Hardware included 20 pounds of 8d nails (for siding), 5 pounds of 6d nails (for small timbers), nuts and bolts, and chain. Included in this category were two rolls of "wigwam" roofing²⁴,

A variety of plumbing items were also acquired. Since the worker's houses lacked indoor plumbing until about 1956 (Trinkley and Hacker 2015:5), most of these items were likely for the main house, suggesting extensive repairs were being undertaken. Items purchased included, pipe fittings, ball cock, flush valve, boiler drain, rubber tank ball, closet tank supply pipe, bath tub supplies, lavatory supplies, 84 feet of ¾-inch pipe, 42 feet of ½-inch pipe, 36 pounds of caulking lead, hose couplings, and various toilet parts.

Hardware items included mill and mill bastard files, a cordwood saw, 20 axes, and saw handles.

Other items included belt and alligator belt lace, and ¼-inch asbestos millboard.

Two other firms were supplying similar materials, including Mill and Contractor's Supply Company, which advertised themselves as ships' chandlers, and J.W. Murchison Company, which sold wholesale hardware.

Mill and Contractor's Supply provided some of the same types of items as Hyman, but it appears that most of the items related to the developing irrigation system being used by the nursery. Items included pipe fittings, 168 feet of 2-inch pipe, Wico Magneto for Stover Gas Engine, Marlot Self-Priming Centrifugal Pump, suction hose, Mueller stop and waste cocks, 50 feet of water hose, and labor installing irrigation and

pump unit.

In contrast, Murchison sold Orton an extraordinary range of hardware items. Tools included two hatchets, two bow rakes, six hoes, six brooms, 12 shovels, lawn mower, Stearns power mower, two hammers, six weed cutters, 38 axes, mill files, saws, saw handles, cross cut saw, axe handles, six 4-tine folks, two 6-tine forks, hand saw, hammer, three grub hoes, hoe handles, and pruning saws.

Paint materials included turpentine, enamel white, light oak varnish stain, green house paint, red lead metal primer, black enamel paint, OSW paint, ivory paint, cream paint, white paint, eggshell paint, sash green paint, gray paint, 20 gal white house paint, 35 lbs putty, flat white paint, white gloss paint, pea green paint, aluminum paint, brown mahogany oil stain, and paint brushes.

Hardware items included a large quantity of nails, including two kegs 60d nails, one keg 40d nails, seven kegs 20d nails, 12 kegs 10d nails, six kegs 8d nails, two kegs 6d nails, 9 lbs LH nails²⁵, and tacks.

Other building materials included 15 rolls of roofing, valley tin, ridge tin, galvanized wire, copper wire, two rim locks, 75w and 100w light bulbs, two rolls screen wire, screen door springs, stove pipe, corner irons, and wood screws.

Farm or nursery supplies included two chain chains, belt for motor sprayer, a galvanized watering pot, harrow points, cow bells, a curry comb, one milk pail, multiple well points²⁶, pump pipe, and one pair of trace chains²⁷.

itself. It may be added to white lead to create a paint.

²³ Anti-fouling paint.

²⁴ This is described in period advertisements as "ruberoid wigwam roofing" which was sold in different weights.

²⁵ These are "lost head" nails, today more commonly called "finishing nails."

²⁶ A well point is a pipe with a point for driving into the ground that has openings large enough to allow water to enter and small enough to keep the water-bearing formation in place. They can be used for many purposes, but were probably used for hand driven wells at Orton.

²⁷ A pair of trace chains transmit the pull of the horse to the singletree. This indicates that Orton still had draught horses.

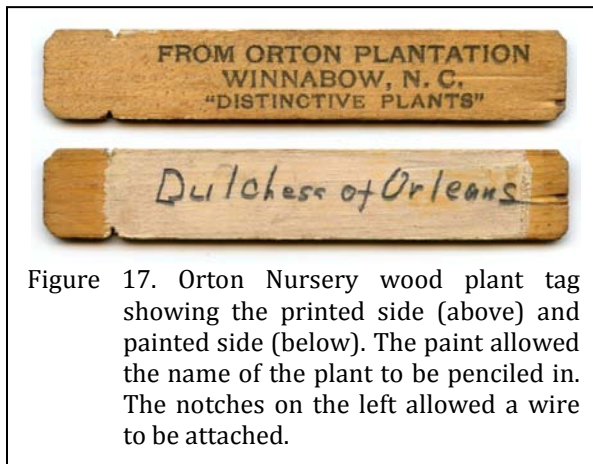


Figure 17. Orton Nursery wood plant tag showing the printed side (above) and painted side (below). The paint allowed the name of the plant to be penciled in. The notches on the left allowed a wire to be attached.

Besides paint, boat supplies included a 900 sq ft ventilate.

Household items purchased included an electric iron, a 6 qt Mt Washington freezer, a water cooler, a water back 941 range²⁸, Atlanta heater²⁹, several Jemco Wood Heaters, wall size³⁰, Coleman mantles³¹, and stove pipe.

Hunting items purchased from Murchison included 125 Nitro Express shells³², game traps, and 300 Shur Shot shells.³³

Five different firms were providing Orton with auto parts and repairs, including MacMillan & Cameron Company, Mac's Auto Parts, Marks Machinery Company, Hughes Brother, and Mauldin Motor Company. There were at least three vehicles, a 1941 Ford station wagon (used extensively by Bragaw), a 1941 Ford pick-up, and

a Ford Model A³⁴ (probably used by Sprunt).

Of course a number of purchases involved oil and gas, including over 170 gallons of Quaker State 30 weight oil and at least 2,650 gallons of fuel. Also included in this category were 200 gallons of kerosene, which might have been used in greenhouse heaters.

Looking over the remaining items, broken into parts and defined repairs, it seems that the Orton vehicles were driven very hard, although the poor roads certainly did not help the situation. Anyone familiar with automobile parts and repair will recognize that some are routine and some represent more serious issues – especially for such recently acquired vehicles.

Repairs included welding and bracing a fender, repairing accelerator, overhaul of a motor, installing an exhaust pipe, replacing a missing governor, repairing a speedometer, adjusting brakes, repairing a rattle in a door, repairing a hood control (opener), overhauling a clutch, tuning motor, investigating a noise in the clutch pedal, repairing a rattle in a fender, repairing a horn twice, replacing replace tie rod ends, removing a rattle and adjusting a clutch, and aligning a front end.

Parts acquired, either for repair by staff or an outside garage included a gas line, plugs, tire tubes, tractor tires, tire repairs, tire valves, Ramco piston rings, headlights, bulbs, mirror, mirror head, heater hose, cooling system sealer, Echlin brush set, piston, spark plugs, fuses, rings, exhaust valve, gasket set, Exide batteries, wiper arm, starter switch, accelerator shaft, gaskets, brake spring, tie rod ends, speedometer cable, spring pins, belts, crankshaft, rods, brake line, tire bolt, shock links, head gasket, and a voltage regulator.

Two items stand out as related to farming rather than automobiles. Orton acquired eight 23-inch disks for their harrow and a replacement

²⁸ This was a range or stove with tubing at the back of the stove for heating and storing water.

²⁹ The Atlanta Stove Works was a major manufacturer of cast iron cooking and heating stoves and ranges from 1898 until it closed in 1987.

³⁰ Wall size is a product that prepares wall surfaces for the hanging of wall paper.

³¹ Mantles are devices for generating bright white light when heated by a flame.

³² Shotgun shells produced by Remington Arms Company beginning in 1926.

³³ Shur Shot was produced by the Western Cartridge Company prior to its merger with the floundering Winchester Repeating Arms Company in 1931.

³⁴ The Model A was brought into production in 1927 and ceased in 1931, so it was an older model vehicle. Body styles ranged from the Tudor to the Town Car.

Table 5.
Yearly Salaries of Orton Employees in 1940

Person	Position	1940 Salary	\$2015
H. Churchill Bragaw	Farm Manager	1600	26,800
C.A. Fox	Forester	960	16,100
Alex Bogie	Assistant Manager	750	12,600
Emma Lou Harrelson	Nursery Manager	364	6,100
Eliga Robbins	Carpenter	300	5,000
Herman Ellis	laborer	280	4,700
Joe Vaught	laborer	260	4,400
Christina Delts	laborer	150	2,500

disc on grist mill. The latter item suggests that Orton was grinding or processing its own grain of some sort. This may also explain the previously mentioned belt and belt hooks.

The remaining invoices were for relatively small purchases. For example, a No. 100 Scott Spreader was acquired directly from O.M. Scott and Sons.³⁵ One cow and calf and a yearling were also purchased from a private seller, S.H. Grist, necessitating the previously mentioned cow food, chains, and bells.

The only fertilizers or plant chemicals for which we have a record in 1942 was 6 pounds of cuprocide³⁶ and rootone³⁷, both purchased from Naco Fertilizers.

A Glance at 1940 Salaries

Table 5 shows salaries of some Orton employees based on the 1940 federal census. When looking at these figures it is important to realize that in 1940 the average per capita income for North Carolina citizens was \$320 (compared to the national per capita income of \$592 (Davis 2003:90). In this context the whites on Orton were just below or far above the state's per capita income. In contrast, all of the African American

laborers listed were significantly below the state's average income.

A 1940 Aerial

Correspondence reveals that Bragaw and Sprunt were trying to obtain publicity shots of the plantation from Fairfield Aerial Surveys in New York. Although none of the

correspondence suggests they were successful, several photographs were sent to Sprunt for consideration and one of these has survived. Shown as Figure 18 it shows the garden and nursery area looking north.

A variety of details are clearly visible in this aerial:

- The 1910 water tank, shown in the 1924 coastal chart and discussed in the 1938 letter regarding upgrades is shown in the center of the photo.
- The T-shaped building that Sturtevant identified as a barn in his plans and which also functioned as an office is shown on the right or east side of the aerial.
- To the south of this building are the "slat houses." Also known as lath houses, these are open sided structures used to provide shade to tender or young plants.
- Even further south is a field with distinct plots, which is perhaps an overflow garden or temporary holding area for larger plants.
- North of the T-shaped barn is a small open field that may have been the area referred to by Sturtevant as a good location for the overseer's vegetable garden.
- West of the water tower are at least two greenhouses running east-west (different from those found more recently at Orton).

³⁵ This famous lawn care company began in 1868 producing the country's first clean, weed-free grass seed.

³⁶ Cuprocide or yellow cuprocide (copper hydrate, $\text{Cu}_2\text{H}_2\text{O}$) was used to as a fungicide.

³⁷ By the late 1930s, indole-3-butyric acid, naphthaleneacetic acid, and their commercial formulations Auxan and Rootone were available and being used to root cuttings of a variety of plants.

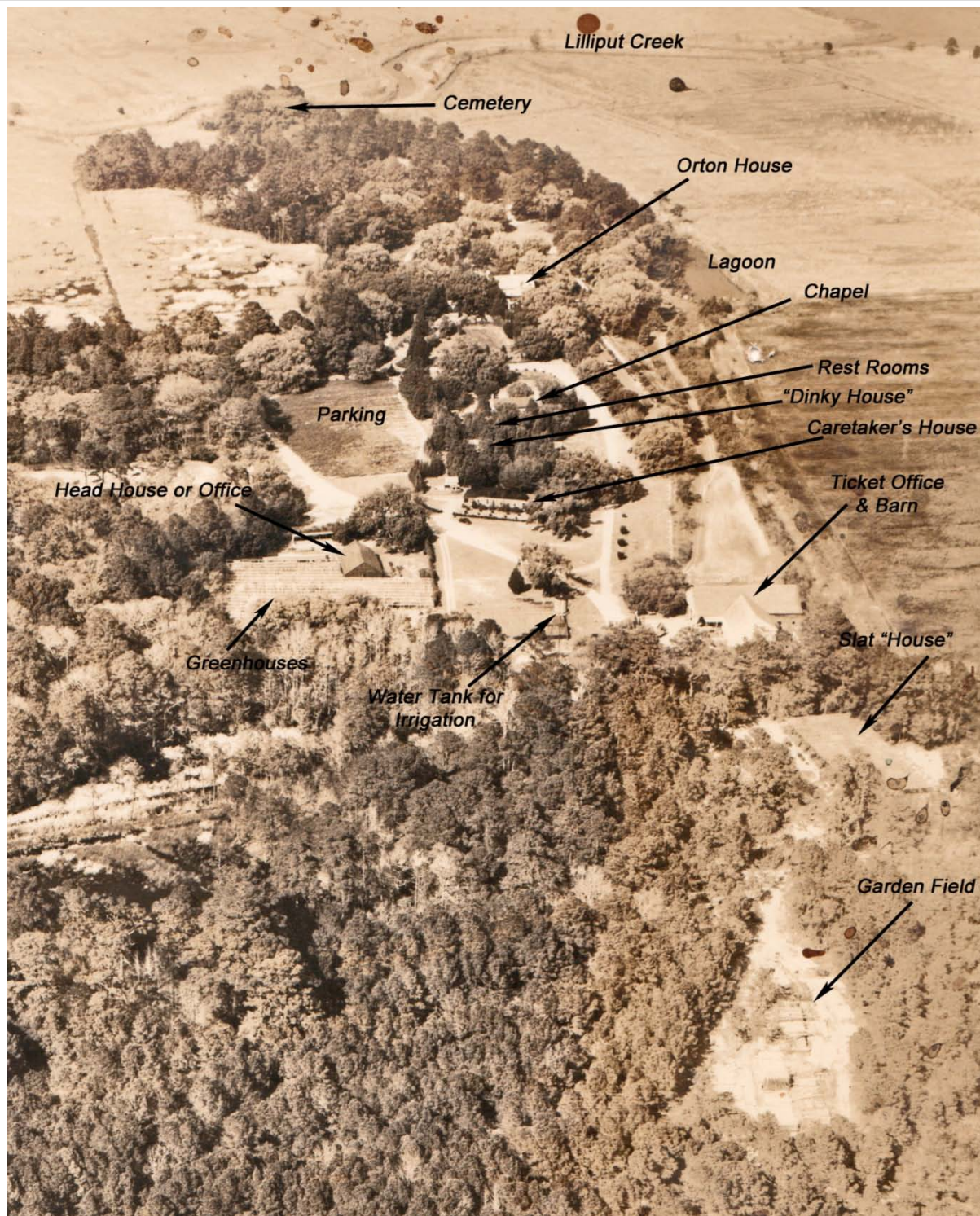


Figure 18. Orton in 1940.

- A wooden headhouse can be seen at the east end of the northern greenhouse. Its gable runs north-south. Greenhouse headhouses held the central temperature-control equipment and provided working and storage space.
- The caretaker's house north of the water tower is clearly visible, being oriented approximately east-west. This structure was demolished sometime after December 2004 and replaced with a new structure by March 2006, based on aerial photographs.
- North of the caretaker's house is evidence of another dwelling which became known as the Dinky House. It was likely a worker's house, but was later used for the storage of nursery records.³⁸ This structure was demolished in early 2013.
- Beyond the Dinky House to the north were two restrooms, one of which can just be seen in the 1940 aerial. Hood (2013) suggests these were constructed between 1935 and 1940, but were removed in early 2013. Not seen in the 1937 Sturtevant plan, it seems a construction date between 1937 and

³⁸ The origin of the name "Dinky" is not known. Jane Henry, in her oral history of the property comments, "In the fifties it was unoccupied most of the time except when the Sprunt's came out in the spring to spend several weeks. At that time they brought their cook out and he stayed in that house. I remember playing with his granddaughter & he is the one who used the Barbecue house over in our yard [the Harry Bogie House south of the main gate] and also came over in the spring and cut the asparagus that grew in the field right behind that first big oak inside the gate. I don't recall his name except we called him Uncle Louis, he was older and must have passed away or retired prior to the sixties. The house was not occupied after that. During the sixties we would go over into the house and borrow books from the huge collection the Sprunts' stored in there. There was also old furniture, an antique phonograph and other things stored there (Jane Bogie Henry, personal communication 2016).

1940 might be reasonable.

This aerial, in conjunction with Figures 11, 12, and 16, provide important clues to the development of the nursery at Orton.

Bragaw Prepares for the Military

On several occasions Bragaw sought to postpone his military obligation. In one of the first recorded accounts he explains,

My reasons for not wishing to be ordered to extended active duty immediately are that I am the head of the family; I have two dependents; and the nature of my work is such that my absence would curtail greatly the operations that I have carried on and necessarily result in the dismissal of numbers of our local laborers My duties consist of operating a large plantation On this plantation we have a pulpwood plant, operate a saw mill, have a farm, commercial gardens and also a nursery. It would take at least six months to a year for me to break someone else in to this place which I now fill (letter from Bragaw to Lt. Col. Paul J. Watte, Adjutant General, HQ, First Military Area, Knoxville, dated September 18, 1940).

In a second letter he wrote that he would,

like to make application to be transferred from the Infantry to the Balloon Barrage Corps. My reason for asking this is that I feel that my slight knowledge of meteorology and my interest in such matters would be of more benefit to the service. I would like to be called to active duty on or about February 1, 1942, as it will

take me a few weeks to get my affairs in order (letter from Bragaw to Lt. Colonel Coe, Knoxville, TN, dated December 12, 1941).

To another correspondent, Bragaw wrote that,

I have volunteered my services to the army and will not be at Orton after about February 1. However, things will go on as usual with our present staff (letter from Bragaw to Mr. O.W. Pritchett, Upland, California, dated December 30, 1941).

It seems likely that as part of these preparations he brought his mother to Southport and purchased a house for her, writing, "Mother is getting along fine and will take up her permanent residence in Southport the 1st of October" (letter to Mrs. Hazel O. Buys, Washington, North Carolina from Bragaw dated September 19, 1941). In an earlier letter he wrote, "I have just bought a house for Mother down in Southport and the building and loan and I are working away on getting it paid for" (letter to James W. Clarke, San Jose, California from Bragaw, dated August 23, 1941).³⁹

While waiting, Bragaw accepted Governor Broughton's appointment as the Brunswick County chairman of the USO fund drive (letter from R.M. Hanes, State Chairman, Winston-Salem, North Carolina to Bragaw, dated May 15, 1941). Within a month Bragaw was writing a variety of local citizens in Southport asking for meetings and contributions (for example, see letter to James

Harper, Southport, North Carolina from Bragaw, dated June 12, 1941).

He had been called to duty by the end of the year and one letter expressed their sadness at his leaving, "I am sorry you are leaving us. We will miss you. Good luck to you" (letter from Mrs. James Buren Sidbury, Wilmington, North Carolina to Bragaw, dated December 30, 1942).

His last act at Orton was to participate in his going away service at Luola's Chapel,

As usual Lieutenant Bragaw led in the services. Joining him were his mother, Mrs. Helen Bragaw; Mr. and Mrs. Jim Ferger, Miss Emma Lou Harrelson, Mr. and Mrs. Alex Bogie, and Miss Esabelle Whitehurst, a teacher in the Wilmington School.

Many of the colored employees on the plantation spoke a few words expressing the general farewell of the colored people to Lieutenant Braw. All of them joined in singing and many were visibly moved ("Farewell Service Is Conducted for Lieutenant Bragaw," *State Port Pilot*, February 20, 1942).

Bragaw's Military Service

After being called into service he was initially sent to Fort McClellan in Alabama where in 1943 the Army had begun the Infantry Replacement Training Center (IRTC). He also was stationed at Camp Blanding in Florida, another IRTC and then at Fort Benning in Georgia. Mollycheck (2015:15) reports that he was able to visit Southport and his mother in May and September 1942. In October 1942 he was promoted to 1st Lieutenant. Finally he was sent to Camp Edwards in Massachusetts, a sending off point for troops for the European theatre. While at Camp Edwards and confronting the reality of being deployed, Bragaw prepared a document providing his mother with power of attorney to

³⁹ Bragaw's mother operated the Camellia Inn from this house. It was purchased from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation on June 12, 1941 for \$3,000 and was situated on the northwest corner of Moore Street and Atlantic Avenue (Brunswick County Register of Deeds, DB 72, pg. 478-479). When Mrs. Bragaw died in 1950, the operation of the Inn was taken over by Churchill's sister, Louise Bragaw Mallison (Mrs Walter Lewis) according to Mollycheck (2015:32). The Inn burned in the last half of the twentieth century and the lot is occupied by a new building.



Figure 19. Bragaw's military photograph.

handle all of his property, moneys, and other affairs.⁴⁰

Mollucke (2015:16-19) provides a more complete picture of Bragaw's military service, noting that the 36th Infantry Division landed in North Africa, April 13, 1943 and trained at Arzew (a port city in Algeria) and Rabat (the capital of Morocco). It is likely that much of the time at these locations was spent training in amphibious landings.

On September 3, 1943 Bragaw landed with his company at Salerno, Italy. At the battle of San Pietro, Italy, Bragaw was awarded a battlefield promotion to the rank of Captain of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 143rd Infantry Division.⁴¹ Shortly thereafter Bragaw received a

superficial wound on December 24 and spent several days in a hospital. He rejoined his company on January 4, 1944 in time for the next engagement, described in the War Department press release,

On January 20, 1944, in Italy, Capt. Bragaw commanded an Infantry company ordered to establish a bridgehead across a river. The company was intended to approach the river on pathways cleared through heavy mine fields, but dense fog and blinding darkness soon hid the markings of the safeways. Putting his men in column with intervals between them, he led the way through the field. During this passage eight men were severely wounded by mines and each time the commander went back among his men, bolstering their courage by his own actions and words; reaching the river he led his men across under violent artillery, mortar and small arms fire, and attached the formidable enemy positions on the steep opposite bank. Through bands of enemy wire he led his company into the foe's outer defenses. While heavy fire pinned his troops to the ground, he exposed himself to make a personal reconnaissance, seeking to improve his positions. In so doing he was killed by enemy fire (W.S. War Department, Press Releases and Related Records, 1942-1945, Henry C. Bragaw).

Bragaw was posthumously awarded the Silver Star and is buried in Block J, Row 9, Grave 44 of the Nettuno, Sicily-Rome American

⁴⁰ Bragaw, in April 1941, purchased a tract on Brickyard Road (Brunswick County Register of Deeds, DB 72, pg. 380) and August 1942 purchased two additional parcels of property in Brunswick County on the Cape Fear River (Brunswick County Register of Deeds, DB 75, pg. 370).

⁴¹ San Pietro is located south of Monte Cassino about

halfway between Naples and Rome. The location was crucial in the drive north to liberate Rome and the major engagement lasted from December 8-17, 1943.



Figure 20. James Ferger in 1937.

Cemetery and Memorial. A memorial stone was erected to him in Oakdale Cemetery.⁴²

Ferger and Orton

Prior to Bragaw's departure Jim Ferger was hired as his replacement effective January 1942, arriving by at least June 1941.

James Ferger was born on February 18, 1912 in Lawrenceburg, Indiana, the son of John Adam Ferger, a hay broker, and Alice M. Kapsch. In 1930 they were living in Cincinnati, Ohio. Ferger

attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, graduating in 1937 and by 1940 had married his wife, Dora. At Chapel Hill he was a member of the Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society.

His time at Orton is poorly documented since Ferger, unlike Bragaw, kept almost none of his correspondence.⁴³

In terms of the gardens, we know that Orton purchased a large quantity of camellias from the Camellia Nurseries in Tallahassee in November and Magnolia Gardens in December 1942. In 1943 Camellias were acquired from E.J. Privatt in Charleston and Walter Allen in Summerville. A single Professor Sargent camellia was obtained from Magnolia Gardens in 1943. The largest number of plants, however, came from Camellia Nurseries in Tallahassee. A small variety of plants were still purchased from Micah Jenkins in Adams Run, South Carolina.

There is also some evidence that Orton may still have been cutting daffodils and irises since Sprunt received an inquiry,

we would like very much to handle your Daffodils and Iris again this season. We would appreciate it if you would give us an idea just when you will be cutting and when we can expect shipments from you (letter from L. Greenberg, Edward Brenner, Inc., Newark, New Jersey to Sprunt, dated January 9, 1943).

Also in 1943 we have documented the first purchase of clay pots by Orton (they had in the past been using paper). In that year they acquired 13,185 pots from the Audubon Nursery in Wilmington for a total of \$88.50. The sizes included 2½ by 2½, 2½ by 3, and 3 x 3 inches.

⁴² The failure to mention the river name in the official press release may not have been a mistake since it was the Rapido River and the infamous battle has been described as "one of the most colossal blunders of the Second World War," a "murderous blunder" that "every man connected with this undertaking knew . . . was doomed to failure" before it took place. It is reported that Bragaw knew he was ordered to do the impossible and made arrangements prior to the battle to have his personal belongings sent home. Over 1,300 American troops were killed or wounded and nearly 800 were captured. The Germans had 64 men killed and an additional 179 wounded.

⁴³ This may be an unfair criticism, since in 1942 Ferger purchased a new Remington typewriter ribbon, file folders, letter trays, and a transfer case. It may be that his correspondence did not survive or is still possessed by the Sprunt family.

Many of these pots seem to have been found at Kendal in an abandoned house.

The only agricultural activity noted was that in 1942 Orton harvested and sold 430 pounds of flue cured tobacco. The sale at Nelson's Warehouse in Whiteville, North Carolina netted Orton \$120.15 (this is minus the warehouse charges, auction fees, and commissions).

There is also little information regarding forestry operations at Orton. On December 19, 1943 we know that 24 loads of oak wood were hauled from Orton by Herbert Parker, although the purpose is not known.

Likewise, there is a letter from a local mill,

A few weeks ago your driver brought in a load of lumber to our plant to be dressed for the U.S. Engineers. He had started unloading and had only thrown a few pieces off his truck when the inspector for the engineers turned same down. The pieces which he had thrown off he left at our plant, but carried the rest of the load back with him. We are enclosing our check to-gether with the invoice to take care of the amount he left with us (letter from J.E. Evans, Cape Fear Lumber Company, Wilmington, to Ferger, dated December 22, 1942).

The only detailed information we have from the nursery collections for 1942 and 1943 are the abundant invoices. While more complete and representing more businesses, the purchases are very similar to those previously outlined for 1941 with one important exception. Review of the 1942 and 1943 accounts reveals that Orton was beginning to stretch out its payments. For example, the March 31, 1943 invoice from McCallum Wholesale Floral Service in Raleigh for 20 bales of moss was not paid until the end of

May, essentially a net 60 schedule. Some companies were being paid net 90 or even net 120 days. For example, in 1943 it took 4 months to pay a bill of \$54.50 to Job P. Wyatt & Sons Co. Four months were also required to pay a \$454 bill from Corbett Package Co. for paper planting cups that same year.

Whether this reflects declining economic fortunes, wartime pressures, or poor accounting practices by Ferger is unknown. Orton was, however, also making similar purchases from a greater variety of suppliers, as though they were shuffling their finances.

In 1943 Orton retained its 1941 Ford pick-up and station wagon. The Model A was still in use, but required a new motor. Newly acquired was a 1941 Buick Sedanette (a two door coupe). Also acquired was a 1937 Plymouth (which required a new motor). By 1943 there was also an International Harvester truck of some sort.

Purchases for the garden and nursery included a range of tools, including round point shovels, shovel handles, axe handles, rakes, hedge shears, pruning shears, jars, several heaters, sprayer nozzle, hose bibs, and wheelbarrow wheels.

We also have a much clearer picture of chemical use at the nursery and in other agricultural activities at Orton. The fly spray Ded⁴⁴ was purchased. Sunoco Spray⁴⁵ was apparently widely used, since at least 110 gallons were purchased in 1942, along with an unspecified quantity of volck nursery oil. Orton was also regularly purchasing "One Spot" flea killer. Although the product was advertised to kill lice, ants, aphids, bedbugs, potato bugs, leaf hoppers,

⁴⁴ Manufactured by American Home Product's Boyle-Midway Division (which also produced the Black Flag line), Fly Ded killed flies with the "new miracle pesticide" DDT.

⁴⁵ Sunoco Spray was a self-emulsifying oil that could be used as a dormant or growing season spray on evergreens. It could also be used as a carrier for other pesticides. It is essentially volck oil.

cabbage worms, and Mexican bean beetles, it was almost certainly used on the plantation's dogs. While we haven't been able to confirm the ingredients, we suspect it was rotenone

The "Acme 75 Rotenone," also known as "Acme 75 Rotenone Sulphur Dust" was also being purchased. This product was advertised as, "an effective non-poisonous insecticide."

Both Transplantone⁴⁶ and Rootone were being purchased by Ferger, in addition to yellow cuprocide, a fungicide. Also purchased was grafting wax, a product that had never been used by Bragaw.

Perhaps the most hazardous material being used by Orton – and in fairly large quantities – was arsenate of lead.⁴⁷ At least 172 pounds were purchased in 1942 and the quantity jumped to 288 pounds in 1943. Assuming even a very modest 10-year span of use, this means that upwards of 2,000 pounds or more might have been used at Orton. As far as we can determine, this was primarily used in the nursery and thus may be found in the various fields around and in the greenhouses.

Another very toxic material used at Orton was cyanogas A dust.⁴⁸ This was a rodenticide

that was pumped into openings; it was, however, also occasionally used as a fly fumigant and even for application on fruits.

The Nursery was also using small quantities of "Black-Leaf" 40, but its environmental consequences are negligible, even though it considered toxic.⁴⁹

In 1943 100 pounds of Snarol was purchased. This may have been a slug bait containing 4% tricalcium arsenate.⁵⁰ A product with an identical name was used as a plant spray and contained 3.5% to 5% calcium arsenate. Because calcium arsenate is highly soluble in water it is considered more hazardous and toxic than lead arsenate, previously discussed. Whether this was a commonly used pesticide, like the lead arsenate, is unknown.

The purchases in 1942 also suggest that three greenhouses may have been present. Not only was a new Marlow centrifugal pump purchased, but three irrigation lines were acquired: one "complete greenhouse line for shed 100' long x 28' wide", "ditto for shed 152' long", and "ditto for shed 115' long." If this interpretation is correct, one additional greenhouse was constructed after the 1940 aerial photograph (Figure 17).

In 1942 two new documents were printed, including, "Directions for Planting Azaleas" and "Fishing Circular." In 1943 we have the invoice for the printing of 4,000 copies of a "Price List Booklet" with 24 pages, the cover, and an insert, as well as 5,000 copies of a "plant list" with 12 pages. This practice of two separate types of publications seems to follow the pattern set

⁴⁶ Transplantone was very similar to Rootone, although its advertising explained that it was "A water-soluble powder containing vitamin B₁ and other parts of the vitamin B fraction, plus certain plant hormones which are active in root-formation."

⁴⁷ Arsenate of lead, lead arsenate, or lead hydrogen arsenate, PbHAsO₄, is an inorganic insecticide. It was gradually replaced by DDT, but continued to be used until 1988 when it was banned in the United States. Inorganic arsenicals are known to be acutely toxic, although its environmental fate is not well documented. Based on very limited data lead arsenate is not predicted to leach significantly, and so may still be found in elevated levels.

⁴⁸ This is calcium cyanide, also known as black cyanide. It is an inorganic compound with the formula Ca(CN)₂. Cyanides are fairly mobile in soil, but long-term impacts are not well understood. Fortunately, it is likely that relatively small quantities were used in the Nursery.

⁴⁹ Black Leaf 40 was a 40% nicotine sulfate solution for the control of "aphis (plant-lice), thrips, leafhoppers on all tree, bush and vine fruits, vegetables, field crops, flowers and shrubs, also apple red bug, pear psylla and similar soft-bodied sucking insects—all "without injury to foliage" according to one catalog. It has a very short residual period – probably only one day – so its environmental consequences are minimal.

⁵⁰ This is calcium arsenate, Ca₃(AsO₄)₂.

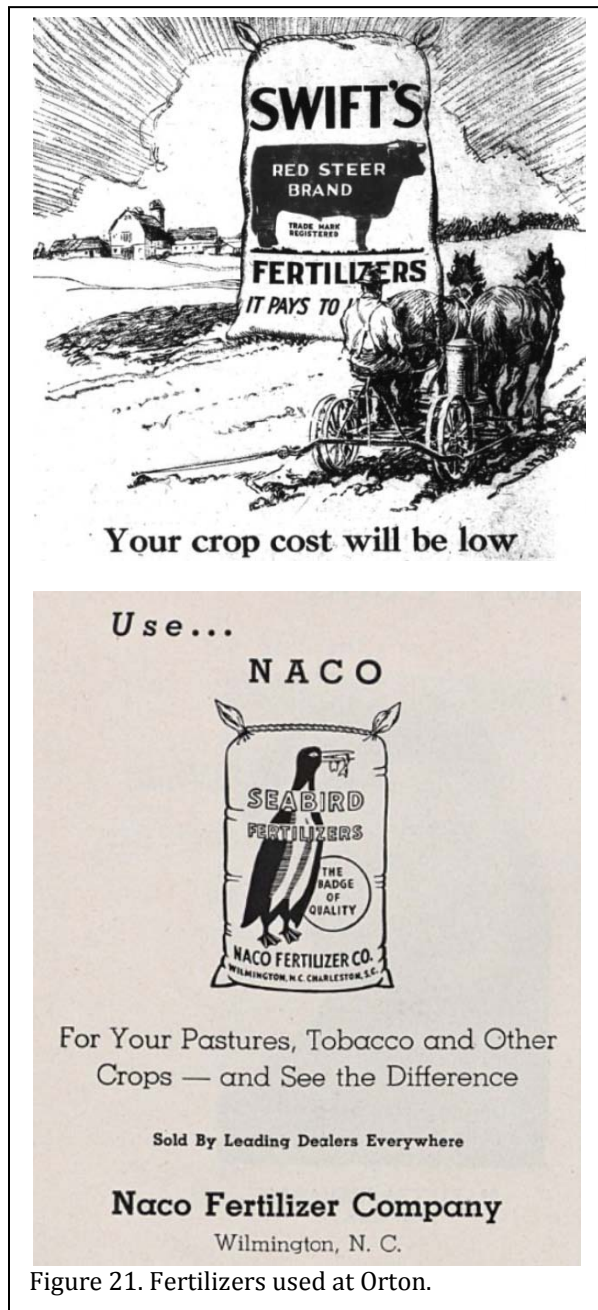


Figure 21. Fertilizers used at Orton.

earlier by Bragaw.

The purchases also suggest continued maintenance, with some items likely for the main Orton house and others for workers. Included in the building supplies were 25 rolls of roofing paper, six pitcher pumps, additional well points,

25 bags of lime, bricks and fire bricks (indicating repair or construction of a chimney), seven rolls of window screen, T-hinges, sash locks, butt hinges, rim locks, and screen doors. In 1943 an additional 80 rolls of roofing were purchased.

Agricultural products acquired, such as a two-horse riding cultivator, continue to indicate that the barn was housing at least a few horses for farm use. Also purchased were clevises, a four disc harrow plow, and plow points.⁵¹

A substantial list of seeds are also itemized, including cow peas, mixed peas, Brabham cowpeas, 8 bushels of New Era cowpeas, 2½ bushels of Whippoorwill cowpeas, 4,000 collard plants, purple top yellow rutabaga, seven top turnip⁵², early curled Siberian kale, half long Danvers carrots, 25 pounds Truckers Favorite corn, onion sets, 24 lbs sweet corn, 25 lbs Black Valentine bush beans, and ½ pound kale.

In addition to these vegetable seeds and plants, there are also invoices for other seeds that were part of Orton's farm management. This might include green manure/soil building crops, pasturage/hay, or wildlife food. Included in this category were 1,000 pounds of Austrian peas, 26 pounds beardless barley, 500 pounds grain pasture mixture, 30 bushels fulgrain oats⁵³, and 275 lbs hairy vetch.

Other seeds that can less certainly be placed in a specific category include raffia seeds⁵⁴, 10 bushels of tokios⁵⁵, Dwarf Essex rapeseed⁵⁶, and 300 pounds of Italian rye grass. The last of these

⁵¹ Plow points are the cutting or leading edge of a moldboard plow and are replaceable.

⁵² Seven top turnips do not have an edible root and are grown for their greens.

⁵³ Fulgrain is a winter to semi-winter type of red oat. It is resistant to the Fulghum races of the oat smut and was grown extensively in the South.

⁵⁴ Raffia (*Raphia spp.*) are palms native to the tropical regions of Africa. Why an effort was made to grow them at Orton is unknown.

⁵⁵ These were probably Tokio Verte soybeans.

⁵⁶ A succulent, cabbage-related plant that is grown for forage or wildlife plots

may have been used for the parking areas, grassed lawn, and pasture.

By 1943 the purchase of plants and seeds was far more comprehensive and it may be that Orton was experimenting with truck farming. The varieties and quantities are listed in Table 6.

Green manure and pasturage included 1,500 pounds Kobe lespedeza, 6¼ bushels chufas, 84 bushels Columbia oats, 300 pounds Early Orange [sorghum] cane, 900 lbs Italian rye grass, 200 lbs rye grass, 5 bushels Biloxi Soy beans, 3 bushels Ootootan soy beans, 87 bushels fulgrain oats treated, 11 bushels abruzzi rye, and 1,000 pounds hairy vetch.

The 1943 invoices record the purchase of “cello-glass,” almost certainly for the greenhouses. This product was advertised as “tightly woven wire screen that has been treated with a coating of celluloid.” It was promoted as weatherproof and indestructible so that it for “cold frames it answers the purpose better than glass.”

We also have in these records a fairly complete picture of fertilizer use at Orton. Over the course of 1942 we are able to document the purchase of 0.8 ton 4-8-4 Red Steer⁵⁷ fertilizer, 5 tons 3-8-10 Red Steer fertilizer, 0.8 ton superphosphate, 1.5 tons Red Steer 3-8-10 fertilizer, 5.5 tons Special Azalea fertilizer, 11 tons of limestone and 12,139 pounds of poultry manure litter.

Fertilizer usage increased from 13.6 tons (not counting the poultry manure) in 1942 to 15.3 tons of Red Steer, plus 11 tons of “Seabird Crop” fertilizer sold by Naco in 1943 and an additional 2 tons Petrel Truck fertilizer.⁵⁸ In addition 6,000

⁵⁷ While Swift & Company is perhaps best known for its meat products, Red Steer was the company’s brand of fertilizer with the advertising catch phrase, “Swift’s Red Steer Fertilizer is made from carefully selected materials. The Red Steer on the bag is a guarantee of highest quality.” They had a variety of formulations for potatoes, tobacco, strawberries, and of course azaleas.

⁵⁸ This was another Naco “Peruvian Seabird Brand” fertilizer.

Table 6.
Seeds and Plants Purchased in 1943.

Quantity	Seed/Plant
7 bags	Cert. Cobbler potatoes
1 bag	pedigree red bliss potatoes
½ bushel	red onion sets
½ bushel	yellow danvers onion sets
10 quarts	yellow danvers onion sets
420 pounds	NC Runner peanuts
4 pounds	Southern Giant curled mustard
2 pounds	Dwarf Essex rapeseed
3½ pounds	Siberian kale
1½ ounce	Special cabbage collar
500	collard plants
3,000	cabbage plants
1 pound	Early Wonder beets
1 pound	Imperial Early blood beet
¼ pound	Imperator carrot
28 pounds	Laxton Progress peas
1½ pounds	Lady Finger peas
½ pound	Special purple top white globe turnips
½ pound	Pomeranian White Globe turnips
1 pound	Imperial purple top white globe turnips
¼pound	Imperial purple top yellow rutabaga
¼ pound	large amber globe turnip
2 pound	Norkolk Savoy spinach
½ pound	Early Scarlet globe radish
6 pounds	Golden Giant corn
45 pounds	Trucker’s Favorite corn
½ pack	Douthit’s Prolific corn
1 pound	Hickory King corn
3 bushels	Imperial Golden dent corn
2 pounds	Brown Sugar crowder peas
2 pounds	black-eyed peas
2 pounds	Early Ramshorn black-eyed peas
238 pounds	New Era peas
23 pounds	Henderson’s bush beans
2 pounds	Burpee’s stringless beans
6 pounds	Black Valentine bush beans
¼ pound	Wood’s Prolific bush beans
45¾ pounds	Fordhook bush lima beans
14 pounds	King of Garden lima beans
15 pounds	Small pole lima beans
12 pounds	Plentiful beans
2 ounces	Banana cantaloupe
2 ounces	Rocky Ford Netted Gem muskmelon
1 pound	A&C [pickling] cucumber
1 ounce	yellow crookneck squash
¼ pound	Giant Summer straightneck squash
¼ pound	NC Long Green okra
1.5 pounds	Dwarf stalk okra
1.5 pounds	Clemson Spineless okra
1,950	tomato plants

pounds of “Basic Slag” was also purchased in 1943.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Slag is formed as part of the process of making iron.

In 1943 1,000 feet of 4-inch drain tile were purchased. This was probably used in subsurface agricultural field drainage, although the location is not specified. It should, however, be something that is looked for as work takes place across the Orton landscape.

Ferger was a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects, the North Carolina Nurseryman's Association, the Holly Society of American, the Horticultural Society of America, and was a founding member of the Camellia Society of America (Knott et al. 2014:57; *Star News*, October 3, 1993, pg. 4B).

In 1943 Ferger made news with the birth of his daughter at Orton. *The State Magazine* noticed the birth as the "the first white child to be born on the plantation during the last fifteen years." The brief article mentions that he was the manager and that "some 170 people live on Orton" (*The State Magazine*, March 27, 1943, pg. 2).

While Ferger's obituary states he left Orton in 1945, several newspaper articles still place him at Orton during that year. For example, in March he was talking to the State Garden School on camellias as the "manager of Orton Plantation ("State Garden School Schedule Promises Extensive Course," *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, North Carolina, March 14, 1946, pg. 13) and later that year he was still identified as with Orton ("State Nurserymen Open Session Today," *Greensboro Daily News*, June 20, 1946, pg. 16).

We believe that Ferger left Orton, establishing a landscape service with his brother, Carl S. Ferger, sometime in 1947. A 1947 article concerning the establishment of a turkey refuge at Orton mentions only J. Laurence and Kenneth Sprunt, suggesting that Orton was "between" managers (Anonymous 1947).

It originally contained as much as 10% available phosphate, as well as a variety of micronutrients. However, its real value was in its "liming" properties that resulted from the limestone used in the steelmaking furnace.

Ferger first appears in the 1956 Wilmington City Directory as operating Ferger Landscaping with brother Carl, although by 1958 he advertises as James Ferger, Landscape Architect with brother Carl as Superintendent.

There are several newspaper articles, dating as early as 1949, in which Ferger identifies himself as a landscape architect ("James Ferger Will Address Sunset Club," *Star-News*, October 2, 1949, pg. 5B; "Ocean Garden Club Meets at Luncheon; Hears James Ferger," *Star-News*, December 6, 1951, pg. 70).

One of his projects was Airlie Gardens where he designed the "Spring Garden," that contained "some 70 varieties of Azaleas which have been arranged about a sunken garden," demonstrating "how many shades of pink, red, and lavender could be planted to harmonize" ("Airlie Gardens Special Treat," *Star-News*, March 30, 1957, pg. 7).

In 1972 he spoke to the 49th Meeting of the Holly Society of America at Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Georgia (*Star-News*, November 18, 1972, pg. 9C). As late as 1993 Ferger was advertising "Oriental style landscape design and landscaping" with "mature size landscape shrubs and trees" (*Star-News*, September 12, 1993, pg. 1G). Ferger died later that same year.

Onis D. Hyatt

Although Knott and her colleagues (2014:57) report that James Laurence Sprunt's son, Kenneth Sprunt, took over management, this is only partially correct. By June 1947 the Orton nursery manager was Onis D. Hyatt, suggesting that little time was wasted in finding a replacement for Ferger ("O.D. Hyatt, Manager of Orton Plantation At Wilmington Will Lecture Here on November 15," *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, North Carolina), November 11, 1950, pg. 4).

Hyatt was born in Dequincy, Louisiana, the son of a farmer, John Hyatt and his wife Velia. In 1940 he was working for the WPA as a

Horticultural Assistant at the Louisiana Technical Institute in Rustin, where he received a B.S. degree. From there he went on to the University of Florida to receive a Master's degree in Agriculture. It was in Florida that he enlisted in the Army (in 1942) and also married Macie Ellen Mims in 1947, apparently just before arriving at Orton.

It was during his tenure at Orton that Tom Draper and his assistant, Florinda Balbin,⁶⁰ made the film "Orton Plantation Under Spring Skies." This was a more professional effort than the Orton films dating back to Bragaw and in the Fall 1951-Spring 1952 Orton plant catalog, it was glowingly described, "harmonious music and voice commentary add their attraction to the brilliance of the color effects and provide eighteen minutes of unusual entertainment" (Anonymous 1951).

This film is especially helpful since it shows various nursery and garden activities during the late 1940s. A few stills from the film are included here as Figures 22 and 23.

There is little doubt that Hyatt was active in the camellia propagation at Orton since he published in the American Camellia Society Yearbooks in 1947 and 1948 (Hyatt 1947, 1948). He also appears in the Draper film working in the greenhouse (Figure 24).

Like his predecessors, Hyatt spoke to local clubs, frequently showing the Orton film (for example,

"Garden Club Members Are Urged to Attend Lecture by Nursery Manager of Orton Plantation Wed. Afternoon," *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, North Carolina), November 14, 1950, pg. 12).

In 1948 Orton joined the *Northern California Camellia Society*, prompting an article in the society's journal that outlined the plantation's history, explored its gardens, and briefly described the camellias introduced by Orton,

Camellias by the hundred sparkle with color from late autumn to early spring, when the Japanese azaleas bring them brilliant carpets. The camellia specialists come from afar to see one of the finest collections in the country.

Each separate garden about the broad sweep of verdant lawns has its own charm; the quarter mile of camellia-bordered path, the formality of the house terrace, the neat garden scroll of interwoven azaleas and dark yew, the reflections of quince and wisteria, rose and holly in the long lagoon, the festoons of moss in the old graveyard, the cathedral arch of oaks above the green circle. In rich greens or blaze of bloom, Orton Plantation embodies the romance of the South.

The Orton Plantation garden design is under the supervision of Robert Swan Sturtevant, M.L.A.

Among the Orton Plantation introductions of camellias are the following:

ANNIE GRAY (Orton No. 50) – Cherry red semi-double with upstanding petals. Introduced into Orton Gardens more than 40 years ago.

CAPTAIN IKE DAVIS – Rose red, peony-like form. Large ruffled

⁶⁰ Surprisingly little is known of Draper and his wife, Florinda. Florinda Balbin appears in the 1930 census as a teacher in Brooklyn. Thomas Draper doesn't appear until the 1940 census at which time he has married Florinda, then reported to be 36 while he was 38 years old; they lived in Brooklyn. Draper was born about 1902 in Delaware. With 2 years of college, he reported his occupation as photographer. A Wilmington, Delaware newspaper article mentions that the film was complete by at least 1948. Draper was reported to be "formerly of Milford, and now of the New York School of Photography" (*The Sunday Morning Star* (Wilmington, Delaware), July 24, 1949, pg. 17). Unfortunately the records of the New York School of Photography (today the New York Institute of Photography) do not go past about 1980.



Figure 22. Stills from the motion picture "Orton Plantation Under Spring Skies" showing nursery and garden operations about 1947. Upper left photo shows Hyatt in the greenhouse with the headhouse in the background. Upper right photo shows gathering up the rooted cuttings in the greenhouse. Middle left shows the cuttings, now in small pots, being prepared for planting. Middle right shows the nursery field being prepared and leveled. Lower left shows the individual camellias being planted. Lower right shows the camellias in the slat house being labeled with tags (see Figure 17).



Figure 23. Stills from the motion picture "Orton Plantation Under Spring Skies" showing nursery and garden operations about 1947. Upper left photo shows Eliga Robbins grafting a camellia. Upper right shows the grafts in place. Middle left shows a bell jar being placed over the grafted plant. Middle right photo shows the Orton Nursery building. Lower left shows a worker moving azaleas from the nursery to the gardens. Lower right photo shows azaleas being planted in the garden.



Figure 24. Olin D. Hyatt at Orton
(from "Orton Plantation
Under Spring Skies").

petaloids with a sprinkling of golden yellow stamens immense blooms. The large parent plant is 50 to 60 years old.

GEORGE B. BARRETT – Large, pure white seedling, incomplete double with a few golden stamens scattered among the petals and the parent flower is very deep pink and the edges of the petals are pure white.

MARY BELL GLENNAN – A very hardy strain of GIGANTEA, which orientated in the garden of Miss Mary Bell Glennan of Norfolk, Virginia. Its cherry-red color is more brilliant than that of GIGANTEA and the white markings are more pronounced. During a severe freeze, of seven degrees above zero, the tight buds of the great majority of camellias at Orton Garden (including GIGANTEA) were

completely ruined, but there was no injury to MARY BELL GLENNAN. (Anonymous 1948:14-15).⁶¹

The year following this introduction – and the Draper film – Camellia Flower Blight (*Ciborinia camelliae*, formerly *Sclerotinia camelliae*)⁶² was found at Orton (Ballentine 1952:54). Wescott noted that the disease had been "long known" in Japan, but was first noted in California in 1938, arriving in Georgia by 1948, a year before North Carolina (Westcott 1950:136). This was echoed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture which found the disease in North Carolina and Georgia, based on the results of a cooperative Federal-State camellia flower blight survey from December 1949 to March 1950 (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1951:264).

There are many who believe the disease originated in the Toichi Domoto nursery, from which Orton acquired plants (Reiss 1992:35-36). North Carolina responded with a quarantine that prevented the shipment of plants into North Carolina, but did not preclude the sale of North Carolina plants (Ballentine 1950:72-73).

Moreover, since the disease infects flowers only, and has overwintering structures that occur in the soil, bare-root plants free of soil and also free of petals, were still able to be sold and even shipped to other states. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture has located a handwritten inspection notebook that describes how Orton developed a technique to get its plants into a bare-root form. Essentially they soaked the plants in a large vat, working the soil from the

⁶¹ If the language seems familiar it is because this article borrowed liberally from the script of "Orton Plantation Under Spring Skies."

⁶² The disease affects only the flowers, but infection can occur any time once the flower buds begin to open if weather conditions are suitable. Flower blight is most serious on mid-season varieties. Initially, flower blight appears as small brownish specks on expanding flowers if infection takes place at the petal tips, but the entire center of the flower may be killed if infection occurs at the base of the petals (Ferrin et al. 2009).

roots by hand. The plants were then sent to another location on the plantation, identified as "Dark Branch," to have the roots burlapped in a wet sawdust mixture. A total of 47,711 camellias were so treated by Orton from September 1950 to March 1951, the length of time the journal was maintained.

The 1950-1951 Orton Plantation Nursery catalog had on its cover a special "Notice to Customers," that explained,

On account of Camellia Flower Blight having been found in one section of the Orton Nursery, we are complying with Department of Agriculture regulations and shipping our Camellia plants balled and burlapped in imported peat. The lightness of the peat moss reduced considerably the cost of transportation and all plants sold have our usual guarantee. This does not include 1 year Camellia grafts, which are growing some distance away at our other nursery (Orton Plantation Nursery, Winnabow, N.C., Retail Price List - 1950-1951).⁶³

This suggests that the Orton staff wasted no time in finding an appropriate mitigation measure. Ms. Leah Roberts, a plant pathologist with the North Carolina Department of Agriculture remarks that with evidence of this mitigation effort, "I doubt that the quarantine had too much of a long term impact on Orton or other nurseries where the disease was found" (personal communication 2016).

By 1954 the disease had spread into (or had been recognized in) New Hanover, Onslow and Wilson counties (Ballentine 1954:64). By 1964 the disease was found in Fayetteville, Bolivia, Charlotte, Fairmont, Goldsboro,

Lumberton, Raleigh, Wilmington and Wilson, causing the North Carolina Department of Agriculture to comment,

This infested area is undoubtedly much larger than the above list. Subsequent scouting and specimens submitted will probably reveal the disease in all areas where camellias are grown. Our quarantine must eventually be abandoned; the vast area of infection makes a quarantine of little value (Ballentine 1964:69-70).

The media paid little attention to the blight and the quarantine appears to have had little impact on business.⁶⁴ About the only mention we have found of the disease in the media was a talk was given to the State Camellia Society in 1954 ("Whiteville to Play Host to State Camellia Society Friday," *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, North Carolina), October 26, 1954, pg. 2).

In 1950 Hyatt's major professor from the University of Florida, John V. Watkins,⁶⁵ visited Orton and being described in a brief newspaper account as being on-site "as a consultant at the Orton gardens" ("Professor Watkins At Orton Gardens," *Star-News*, February 2, 1959, pg. 14). It is tempting to suggest that he had been brought in to devise an appropriate mitigation for the blight, but we have no evidence to support this, other than the timing of the visit.

⁶⁴ In 1970 when the Southern Plant Board prepared a summary using input from all southern states regarding whether or not the disease was still a regulatory concern, the overwhelming consensus was that, no, the disease had not proven as devastating as originally thought. By 1971 North Carolina was in the process of revoking the quarantine (Ms. Leah Roberts, personal communication 2016).

⁶⁵ John V. Watkins, former professor of environmental horticulture, devoted his professional life to teaching courses in landscape horticulture at the University of Florida. He authored or coauthored a number of books, including *Florida Landscape Plants: Native and Exotic* and *Your Florida Garden*.

⁶³ A major interest is where this "Dark Branch" "other nursery" "some distance away" was located.

Unfortunately, little else is known about Hyatt's time at Orton. By 1953 he had left and was Assistant Professor of Horticulture and Agronomy at McNeese State University. During his work at McNeese he became the head of the agriculture school, serving as the President of the Louisiana Camellia Society and a National Board Member of the American Camellia Society. Hyatt died on August 12, 1993 and is buried in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

Alex Bogie as Manager

The management at Orton becomes confused after this point. Knott and her colleagues assume that Kenneth Sprunt⁶⁶ took over as manager and his is the only name that appears in the Fall 1953-Spring 1954 Orton catalog. Moreover, he is often quoted in newspaper articles. For example, in 1951 he is identified as manager ("Camellia Gardens Open in State," *The Highpoint Enterprise* (High Point, North Carolina), March 4, 1951, pg. 1). He was often the "face" of Orton, seeming to appear at more public events than did Hyatt (for example, "Mr. Sprunt to Speak Here on Camellias," *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, North Carolina), January 17, 1951, pg. 3; "Orton Camellias Better Than Ever," *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, North Carolina), February 5, 1953, pg. 2; and "Tryon Palace, Elizabethan Gardens Among Attractions at Flower Show," *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, North Carolina), April 2, 1960, pg. 3).

There is a brief and tantalizing mention of Kenneth in a 1940 letter,

⁶⁶ Kenneth Murchison Sprunt was born in 1920. He enrolled in the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He attended UNC from Fall 1939 through Summer 1942, but there is no record of an earned degree or major. At the outbreak of WWII he enlisted in the U. S. Coast Guard and served on a sailing vessel for Submarine Patrol in the mid-Atlantic. Following the war his biographers report that he was manager at Orton, although in 1955, he became a partner in Carolina Pacific Plywood, retiring in 1973 (the same year his father, James Laurence Sprunt, died). In 1978, he became President and CEO of Springer Eubank Oil Company, retiring in 2005. He died in 2011.

When the Carlsons of Greensboro, mentioned that you and Kenneth were "interested in horticulture", that was before the writer had seen your intensive nursery operations at Orton Plantation. My hat is off to you, sir. That is one of the most interesting places I ever had the pleasure of visiting. Please pardon my forwardness in offering any "advice" to Kenneth! (letter from Henry Chase, The Chase Nursery, Chase, Alabama to J. Laurence Sprunt, dated October 2, 1940).

The only response that we have is from Bragaw, "I think your offer of advice to Kenneth was not only kind but would be exceedingly valuable to him and I hope that some day he may be able to avail himself of it" (letter to Henry Chase, from Bragaw, dated October 5, 1940).

Regardless, we believe that his role as "General Manager" likely did not involve day-to-day activities. Instead, we suspect that the nursery and garden manager was Alex Bogie, who as early as the 1940 census was identified as the Assistant Manager.⁶⁷ During the early 1960s Bogie was consistently listed as manager in news accounts ("Azaleas Bursting In Bloom," *the High Point Enterprise*, March 26, 1961, pg. 11; "Pretty Girls, Pretty Flowers," *Star-News*, April 8, 1962, pg. 1C). A 1962 article mentioned that Bogie had been in the flower business for 26 years, suggesting he began at Orton about 1936. His wife, Janie, also worked at Orton's office beginning about 1968 ("Slamming Door Means Blooming Flowers at Orton," *Morning Star*, April 25, 1980).

⁶⁷ James Alexander Bogie, Jr., generally known as Alex, was born in 1910, the son of James Alexander Bogie (Sr.) and Martha Carolina Millinor. The father was English, born on the Isle of Man, and in the 1920 census is listed as working on a fishing boat in the Smithville (now Southport) area. By 1930 the father was a watchman at the local menhaden factory and Alex did not have an occupation listed.



Figure 25. Kenneth Sprunt with camellias in 1954 (University of North Carolina Hugh Morton Collection, P081_NTBS4_004080.tif)

Their work at Orton was a family affair. Alex Bogie was the father of Harry Bogie (1911-1987) and Ethel Bogie (1921-1999). Harry married Emma Robbins, while Ethel married Eliga Robbins and all worked and lived on Orton. Harry and Emma Bogie lived in the “gatehouse” today set south of the main entrance. Their daughter, Jane, also worked at Orton.⁶⁸

In late 1954, shortly after Hyatt left the nursery and probably while Alex Bogie was active in management, the landscape architect Charles F. Gillette⁶⁹ visited Orton and made some preliminary garden recommendations.

Knott and her colleagues (2014:60) suggest

⁶⁸ For the period from 1968 to 1972, office salaries routinely included Eliga Robbins, Harry Bogie, Alex Bogie, and Janie Bogie.

⁶⁹ Charles F. Gillette (1886-1969) is recognized as a premier landscape architect association with the restoration of historic gardens in the upper South. He established a regional style, known as the “Virginia Garden,” characterized by its understated classicism and attention to detail.

the visit was in conjunction with Gillette’s work for James Laurence Sprunt and his new suburban Wilmington house. Of course Gillette’s association with Orton dates back to 1940, when Bragaw corresponded concerning Sam Nash’s nursery.

As a result of the work a two page document suggesting garden changes was keyed to a plan of the property (see Figure 26). The recommendations were fairly generic and Knott and her colleagues (2014:60) indicate that no action was taken. At least in terms of the nursery it is difficult to understand what is already in place and what is being suggested. For example, there appears to be a significant change in roads

between the 1940 aerial and Gillette’s plan. The plan shows that the Sprunt doll house (see Trinkley and Hacker 2012:Figure 44) was being used as the nursery office. But there is no evidence of the headhouse or greenhouses (which were likely off the plan sheet to the left or south). Nor is the barn to the east shown. The manager’s house is also much smaller in the Gillette drawing than shown in 1940. Likewise, the Dinky House is missing from the drawing. Consequently, the Gillette drawing offers relatively little assistance in our interpretation of nursery activities, except to suggest that Gillette did not anticipate that they would cease anytime soon since he shows a variety of areas for propagation and sales.

Knott also briefly mentions that Morley Jeffers Williams and his wife, Nathalia Williams⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Williams was born in 1886 in Tillsenburg, Ontario, Canada. He attended engineering school and subsequently worked for a railroad company in Canada. In 1935 he obtained a horticultural degree from the Ontario Horticultural College, following a special course in landscape gardening. Williams then enrolled in

conducted some work for the Sprunts, although it does not seem to have impacted the nursery area (Knott et al. 2014:60).

That same year (or possibly in late 1957) Mr. and Mrs. Sprunt hired Morley Jeffers Williams to undertake work at Orton, which also engaged the talents of his wife, Nathalia Williams, an architect with whom he had practiced in the past. Four known surviving drawings bearing both their names were produced for the Sprunts between 2 October 1958 and 6 February 1959.

About the only major activity we have been able to document is that the garden paths were paved with asphalt in 1969. This was apparently a fairly substantial undertaking, with a cost of nearly \$4,000. The tractor shed, subsequently removed when Louis Bacon acquired the property, was constructed in 1972.

Plants were still being acquired in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Relatively minor purchases were being made from Laurel Lake Gardens and Nursery, Inc. (Salemberg, North Carolina)⁷¹, Spring Hill Nursery (Tipp City, Ohio), Jack Zonneweld, and Solcum Water Gardens (Winter Haven, Florida). Larger purchases were

made from Tinga (Castle Hayne, North Carolina), Boyd's Nursery (Loxahatchee, Florida), Russell Gardens, George J. Ball Co. (Chicago, Illinois).

Jane Henry provides an interesting overview of activities during the late 1970s when she worked in the doll house office,

The people that worked in the office had mainly [handled] ticket sales, answering the phone, restocking concessions etc. and when I worked there week-ends & summers I had the fun job of cleaning the restrooms daily also. Usually there was no one else around the office during the day, except occasionally a worker came up for something or the manager came into his office. The old office was divided into two main parts; front left was counter and sales and [to the] right were concessions (concessions were a drink box [both Coke and Pepsi products were sold], Lance cracker products, and postcards) and in the back there was the manager/caretakers office that contained two desks and a storage room that contained miscellaneous stuff from extra drinks to chemicals and sprays. One of the walls in the front area had built in cabinets & there were postcards, brochures, and old ledgers where visitors signed and maybe some records too. I think there was at least one file cabinet in both areas but memory is dim there since I really didn't deal with records and files. I know there were some records there. I'm sure there were some kind of payroll records kept too. Time cards or some type of record was sent to the Sprunts and they brought payroll out on

Harvard's School of Design, receiving a Master's in landscape architecture in 1928. In 1930 he joined the faculty while also operating a private landscape architectural practice in Cambridge. His wife, Nathalia, was also a trained architect, studying at MIT and the Fontainebleau School of Architecture in France. From 1941 to 1947 they operated a private practice in Bluemont, Virginia and in 1947 Morley Williams joined the faculty at the North Carolina State College in Raleigh. Within a year he became the head of the Landscape Architecture School. In 1952 he left academia to work on the restoration of Tryon Palace. By 1962 his association with Tryon Palace dissolved, largely because of his unwillingness to complete any written documentation of his archaeological or restoration efforts (Beaman 2002:354). He died in 1977 in Lottsburg, Virginia.

⁷¹ This nursery was quickly overshadowing Orton. In 1970 it advertised a 1¼-mile camellia walk with 600 labeled varieties. The garden was open for free and the nursery boasted 500,000 azaleas, hollies, ornamental shrubs and trees, as well as 80,000 camellias container grown and balled and burlapped in the nursery.

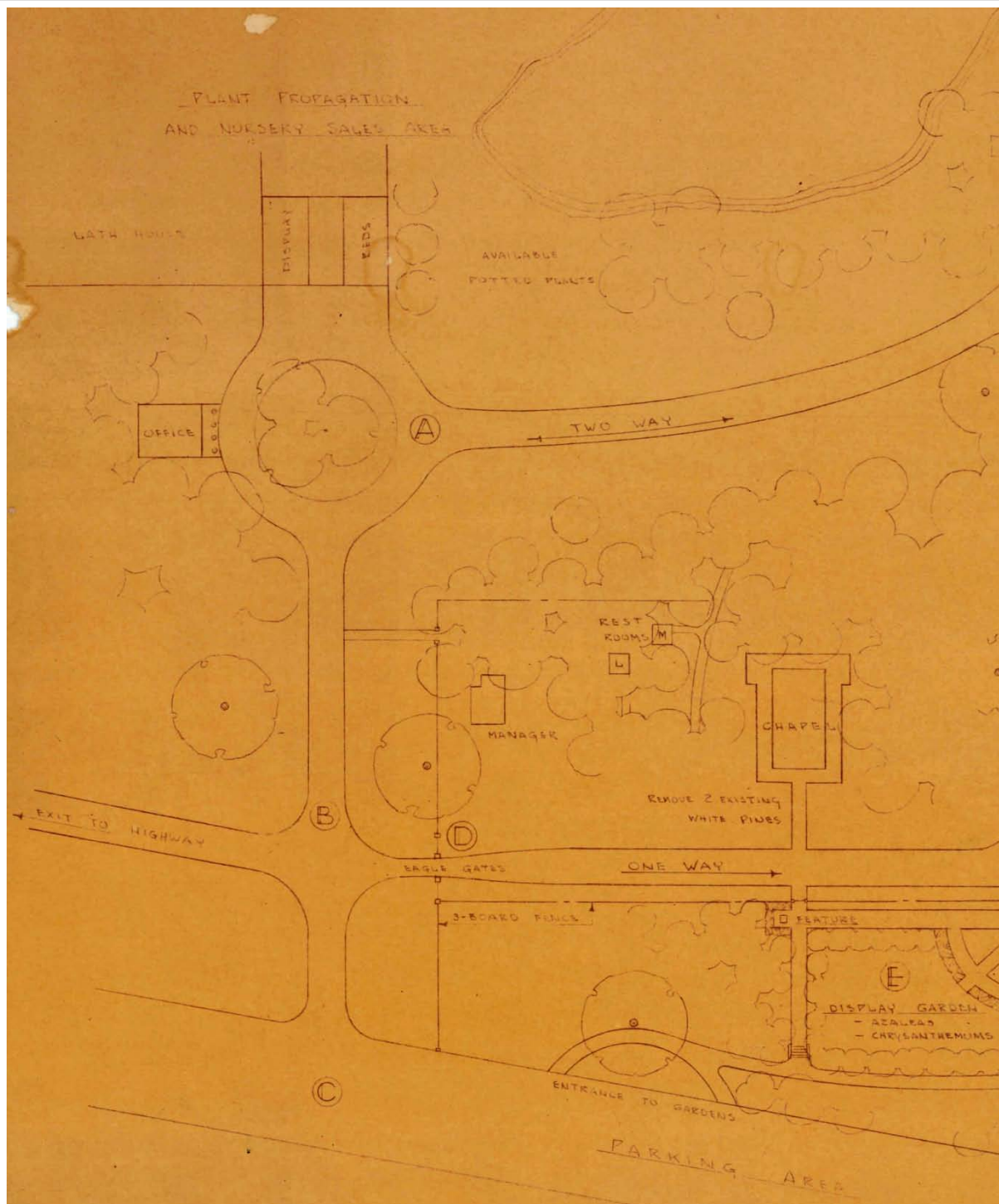


Figure 26. A portion of Gillette's January 1955 plan for Orton, showing the nursery and Chapel area.



Figure 27. Example of the asphalt paved walks at Orton, installed in 1969.

Fridays. Most of the bookkeeping and records were done by the Sprunt family.

There were two greenhouses that I remember, one directly behind the office, same orientation as the office, parallel to the river and one directly beside the office. That one was later torn down & just a slat covered area was there, no azaleas. There was also the building where the camellias were, that was built later, late 50s early 60s, I'm not sure. There may have been another one also; newer, built behind the barn going up the hill toward Eliga's house I don't remember much about it (Jane Henry, personal communication 2016).

Less and less effort was being devoted to farming activities at Orton, although in July 1970 there was an unusual charge in the amount of \$8.00 for "twine and tin foil to keep out deer." Nevertheless, the last time the farm operations were included in the profit and loss statements was in 1964.

While not rice was being grown, Orton

continued to spend money on the rice fields. There are periodic charges for "repair to rice field dyke" as well as "improvements to dikes," "dragline and labor for dykes," and "line work ricefield." In 1968 alone nearly \$3,500 was spent on the ricefields.

It was during Alex Bogie's time at Orton that James Laurence Sprunt died in 1973. Sprunt's widow, Annie Gray Nash Sprunt, died five year later in 1978.

The sons differed dramatically on the future of Orton and in 1982 James Laurence Sprunt Jr. (1915-2003) brought suit for the division of Orton Plantation among the four heirs.

It was about this time that Alex Bogie retired from Orton, leaving Orton Plantation after essentially a lifetime on the property. Whether his decision was based on the family dispute can't be said, but it must have been a tumultuous time for everyone at Orton.

Profit and Loss Statements from 1963 through 1973

Although we don't have correspondence or really any other detailed information regarding operations during this period, there are profit and loss statements for the plantation that provide some clues regarding the operations over the 10 years (the statement for 1965 could not be located).

Figure 28 shows some of the principle data for this period. All three of the primary operations – the nursery, gardens, and forestry – show varying degrees of profitability. If trend lines were added, however, both the nursery and forestry operations show a downward trend, suggesting that long-term, both operations were likely to become significant drags on the plantation. The one "shining light" was the garden, which showed steadily improving profits.

Nevertheless, the plantation as a whole demonstrated a staggering loss year after year. The trend line, however, does suggest a gradual improvement, albeit slow.

Table 7.
Schedule of Life Estate Assets at Orton

Item	Cost Basis
Tenant houses	19,055.29
New garage, main house	1401.06
Rest rooms	801.20
Office building	1,860.82
Fire tower	3,276.41
Wire construction	4,751.25
Slat houses	11,523.98
Hot houses	7,402.60
Deep well, water supply, irrigation	12,545.08
Roadways and walks	7,476.85
Road culvert & causeway	1,525.50
Bridges, bulkheads & spillways	9,449.34
Garden look-out	3,294.40
Improvements – main house	9,108.00
Redwood benches & rails	430.85
New gate	510.16
Fountain, statue & garden pool	998.93
Tractor shed	1,340.48

While each operation had its own labor costs, supply costs, and related expenses, the accounting at Orton relegated a variety of expenses to a category called “General Expenses.” These included auto and truck expenses,

Table 8.
Dwellings Occupied by African American Workers about 1960

Location	Structure	Occupant
Kendal	Dwelling	Betsy Vaught
	Dwelling	Vacant
Lilliput	Dwelling	Herman Ellis
	Dwelling	Cora McKoy
	Dwelling	Andrew McMillian
	Dwelling	Johnny Edge
	Dwelling	Clarence Jones
	Dwelling	John Henry Brewington
	Dwelling	Ida Ellis
	Dwelling	Jenkins Brewington
	Dwelling	Susan Smith
	Dwelling	Josephine King
	Dwelling	Vacant
	Barn	Vacant
Dark Branch	Store	Mr. Montgomery

It does not appear that shedding one or more operations would have made Orton profitable without a strategy to significant reduce these “general expenses.”

The statement for 1973 is of special

interest since it lists life estate assets in the depreciation schedule, providing a view of what was on the plantation at the death of J. Laurence Sprunt. That list is shown below as Table 7. By this point in time Orton’s workers were primarily living on either Kendal or Lilliput, so the \$19,055.29 identified as tenant houses must have been those houses on the plantation used by white workers.

The next two largest costs were for the well and the slat houses. Surprisingly, the plantation’s green houses were significantly less costly than the slat houses.

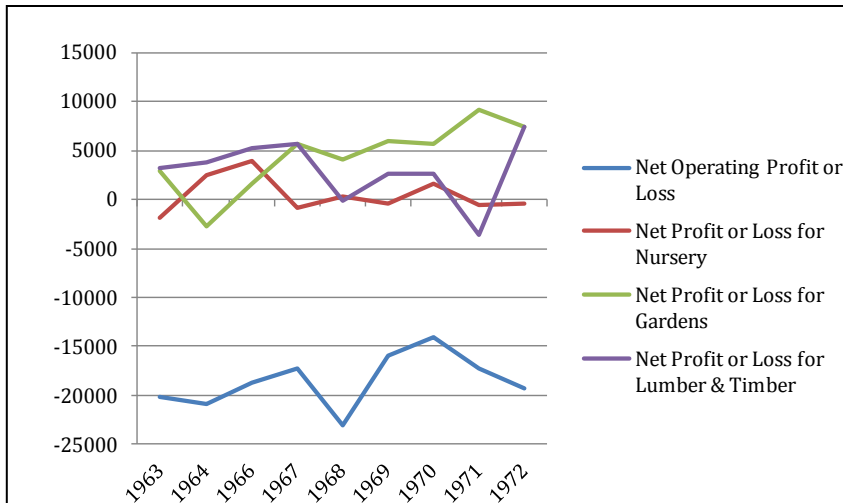


Figure 28. Profit and loss data for various Orton Plantation operations.

depreciation, insurance, maintenance payroll, taxes, and insurance. These expenses were so large that they could not be offset by the profits realized in the various operations.

One of the most interesting notations in the 1973 statement is the “inventory write-down” of \$72,834.77.⁷² A write-down occurs when the carrying value of an asset can no longer be justified as fair value and the likelihood of receiving the book value is questionable at best. While the document doesn’t specify what the inventory consisted of, subsequent research revealed that it did reflect the nursery stock, with the value written down to an appraised value. We know, however, that the nursery was not terminated with the death of J. Laurence Sprunt in 1973.

This seems consistent with other factors we have found. For example, one oral history recalls,

The nursery was still going in the early to mid 60’s. I remember seeing big trucks going in and coming out loaded with plants, mainly the Rose’s store bought plants each year. Each summer cuttings were made & put in the greenhouses to root and I think probably that was how it was phased out; they just did less and less cuttings (Jane Bogie Henry, personal communication 2016).

In addition, advertising for the nursery also declined over the years. The last ad for plants in *The State* actually appeared in 1959 – after that only the gardens were promoted, without any mention of purchasing plants (*The State*, March 21, 1959, pg. 28).⁷³

Table 8 lists the occupants of the various worker’s houses about 1960. As previously mentioned, none of the workers were living on

⁷² This single expense resulted in the 1973 document reflecting a net operating loss of \$72,609.90 and is why that year has not been included in Figure 22.

⁷³ Garden advertisements continued at least until June 1986 and likely later.



Orton Plantation House, Wilmington, North Carolina

**239 YEARS OLD—
always protected by paint
made with LINSEED OIL**

Linseed oil is the all-important element in exterior paint for it adds weather resistance. Because of its natural ability to preserve wood, linseed oil has been used in paints for generations. Today linseed oil based paints, proved by time and improved by technology, protect the beauty of our nation's homes.

Before you paint your home, get the facts about paint made with linseed oil from your local painting contractor. He is an authority on paint and stakes his reputation on the paint he uses and recommends. Take a professional's advice and give your home the lasting protection of paint made with linseed oil.

NATIONAL FLAXSEED PROCESSORS ASSOCIATION
1017 NATIONAL PRESS BUILDING • WASHINGTON 4, D. C.

Figure 29. During the 1960s revenue was also generated by licensing images of Orton, such as this 1969 advertisement sponsored by the National Flaxseed Processors Association.

Orton, having been moved off site in the early 1950s as a result of Sunny Point construction.

Prior to that Jane Henry remembered that,

[Herman and Annie Ellis] were also one of the families that lived on Orton before Sunny Point, across from the big field area. I think it’s referred to as the south field now. Herman, the John Parker family and I think Johnny

Edge all lived in that area. I only remember there being about four or five families at that time (Jane Henry, personal correspondence 2016).

We have not been able to identify the “Dark Branch” store owned by J. Laurence Sprunt and rented to a Mr. Montgomery. It may, however, have been the same store in which Emma Lou Harrelson’s father, Isham D. Harrelson, worked during the 1930s.

In the 1960s the Sprunt’s kept an account of “Advances to Employees,” that included names such as George Murrent, Rosa McMillon, Clarence Jones, Andrew McMillon, and Annie Ellis. There was also a note, “Johnnie Edge Account owed at death \$47.14 written off as uncollectable debt 9/9/69.”

	Quarter	Year Est.
Bogie, Alex	1404.12	5616.48
Bogie, Harry	1426.49	5705.96
Bogie, Janie	1020.21	4080.84
Clark, Robert	736.16	2944.64
Davis, Richard	719.30	2877.20
Edge, Mary J.	212.51	850.04
Hall, Allie	816.86	3267.44
Jones, Clarence	972.70	3890.80
Lamm, Ella	172.87	691.48
McMillon, Rosa	796.85	3187.40
Murrent, George	281.33	1125.32
Parker, John	223.71	894.84
Robbins, Eliga	1305.26	5221.04

There are also occasional notes of payment for activities other than routine employment. For example, in February 1972 Chris Delts was paid \$2.50 for “picking [cleaning] ducks” while Clarence Jones was paid \$22.00 for “planting shrubbery in Wilmington” in March 1972.

During this late period, Sprunts handled payroll by having Alex Bogie prepare the checks

for employees to sign back over to Orton for deposit in another account. Orton would then withdraw that amount of money and distribute it to the staff in pay envelopes. We presume this accounting system allowed a paper trail of the fund distribution, while providing employees with cash in an area where banking would still have been difficult, especially for the African American workers.

Based on our brief review it appears that pay checks were distributed every Thursday, probably allowing cash to be distributed on Friday, the following day. Table 9 shows the employees and payroll for the most complete 13 weeks in the Second Quarter of 1975, and a projected yearly salary. This projection must be used with extreme care since it became clear in our analysis that payroll was based on hours worked, varying dramatically from week to week, especially for the African American employees. It is also unlikely that Harry Bogie would make more yearly than his father and the plantation manager, Alex.

To help place these salaries in perspective, Alex Bogie’s salary, converted in 2015 dollars would be \$25,400; Eliga Robbins salary would be \$23,600; Clarence Jones salary would be approximately \$17,600; and Mary Edge’s salary would be about \$3,845.

The Closing Years

Instead of a forced division, the suit brought by James Laurence Sprunt, Jr. was settled by the sale of his undivided one-fourth interest in Orton Plantation to his three half-brothers, Kenneth Murchison Sprunt, Samuel Nash Sprunt, and Laurence Gray Sprunt, in April 1984. Knott and her colleagues argue that the brothers more or less continued the established pattern of care at the plantation (Knott et al. 2014:60). Kenneth Sprunt focused on the gardens and grounds, Laurence Gray Sprunt supervised the agricultural, woodland, and timbering side of operations, and Samuel Nash Sprunt, in Texas, was a silent partner.

The three brothers held Orton Plantation in a joint undivided ownership, with one-third interests each, until 1989 when a division was effected. The core of the plantation, including the mansion, the outbuildings, gardens, grounds, and rice fields, was set apart as a separate tract and continued in the joint, undivided interest of the three as Orton Plantation, a general partnership.¹ In 1996, Laurence Gray Sprunt bought out the interests of his two brothers in the historic core tract, becoming the sole owner of the gardens and core tract.

Laurence Gray Sprunt's son, David H. Sprunt (b. 1967), joined the staff of Orton in October 2001 as the manager of the gardens.

Pat Marshburn as Manager

Bryan Patrick Marshburn was born in

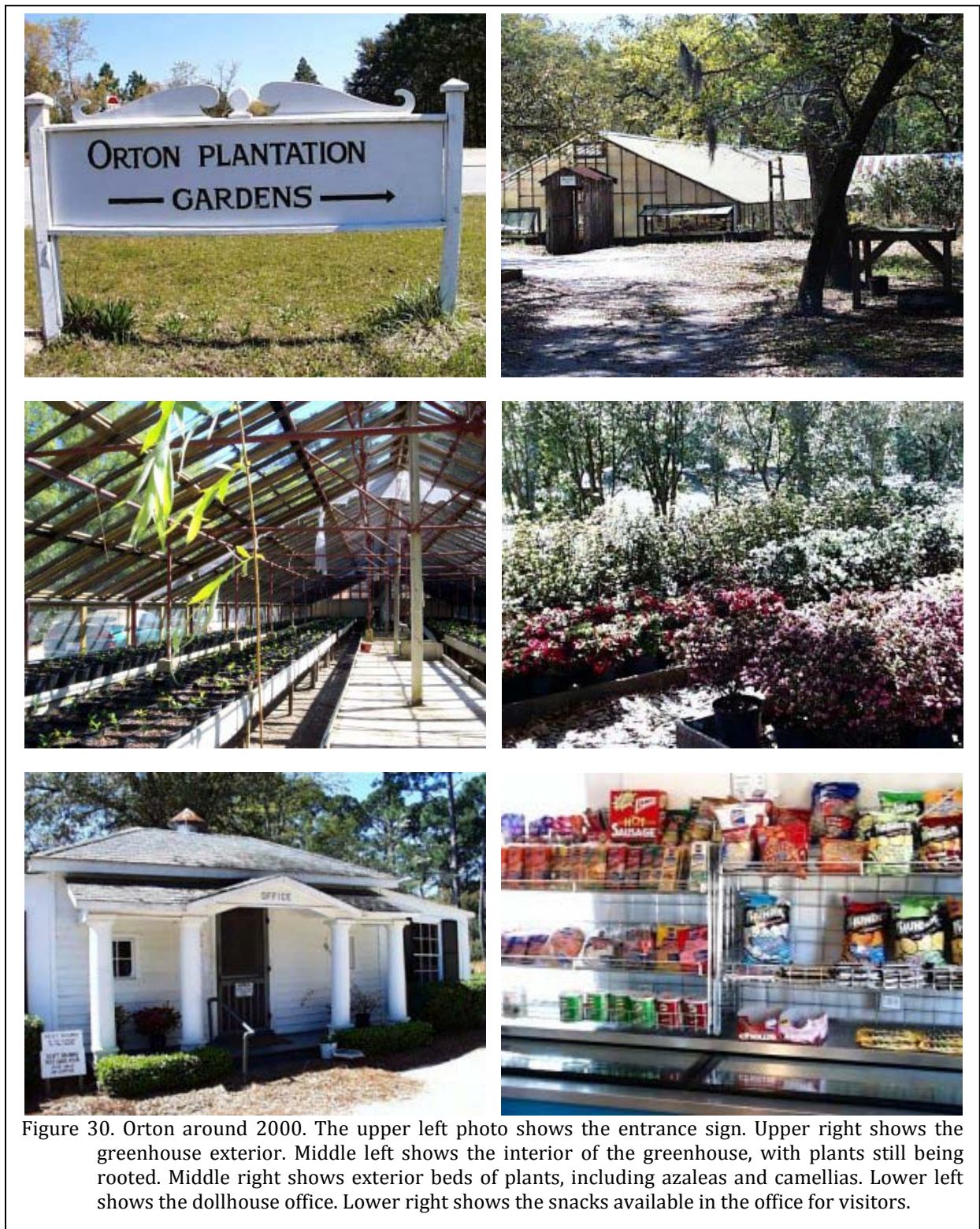
Wilmington in 1956, the son of Dr. Elisha Thomas and Lula Patrick Marshburn. He attended Appalachian State University and received an Associate Degree in Forestry and Wildlife Management from Wayne Community College.

Marshburn began at Orton in March 1982, about the time that James Laurence Sprunt, Jr. brought his suit to force a division of his father's property. Marshburn served as manager until January 2005.

It was during his tenure that Orton began to be featured in 23 films and 34 television series or movies. These include *Firestarter*, *Date With an Angel*, *Crimes of the Heart*, *Raw Deal*, *Tune in Tomorrow*, *The Road to Welville*, *When We Were Colored*, *Kyoka (Japan)*, *The Grave*, *Lolita*, *Shadrack*, *Bruno*, *Morgan's Ferry*, *The Dangerous Lives of Alter Boys*, *Black Knight*, *The Divine Secrets of the Ya Ya Sisterhood*, and *A Walk to Remember*. Television movies and series included *Windmills of the Gods*, *T-Bone-n-Weasel*, *Young Indiana Jones*, *Matlock*, *Lovejoy*, *The Road Home*, *Against Her Will: The Carrie Buck Story*, *Margaret Mitchell*, *Dead Giveaway*, *The Sister In Law*, *The Rose Garden*, *Blue River*, *The Crying Child*, *Morning Glory*, *Other Family Secrets*, *The Summer of Ben Tyler*, *The Face in the Mirror*, *Hide and Seek*, *The Wedding*, *Ambushed*, *Dawson's Creek*, *The New Professionals (England)*, *Glory Glory*, *Funny Valentines*, *Nickelodeon*, *The Color of Love*, *Freedom Song*, *The Runaway*, *Going to California*, and *The Locket* (for additional information, see <http://www.ncbrunswick.com/activity/brunswick-islands-in-the-movies-southport>).

Figure 30 and 31 show some of the structures and layout of the plantation during the period of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

¹ The plantation woodlands were divided among the three men; Kenneth Sprunt received the Orton woodlands, Laurence Gray Sprunt was deeded title to those associated with Kendal, and Samuel Nash Sprunt gained ownership of the Lilliput woods on the north edge of the overall holding (Knott et al. 2014:61).



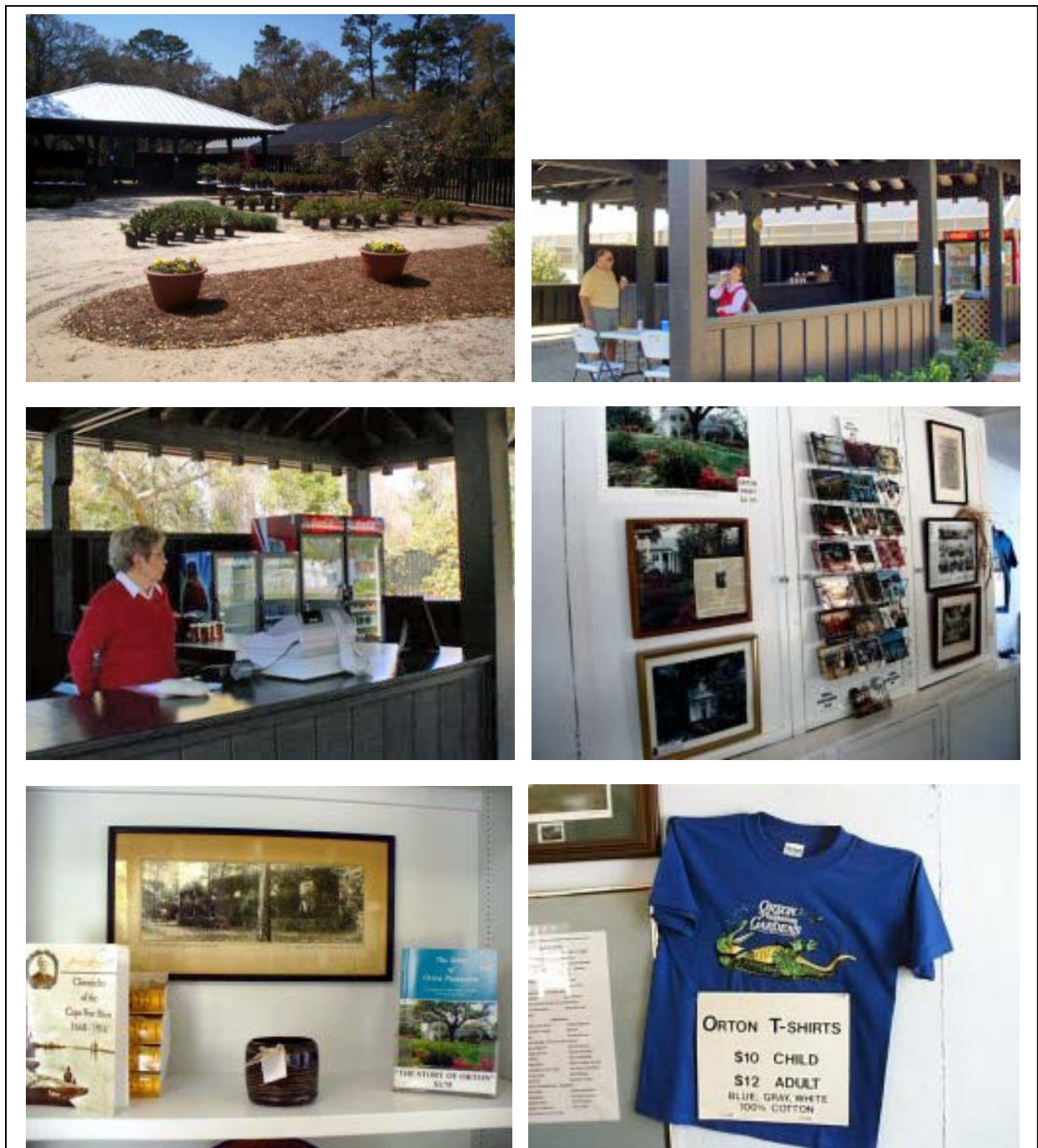


Figure 31. Orton about 2007. The upper left photo shows the pavilion that was added to provide a covered area for visitors and rental activities. Upper right and middle left photos show the luncheon area. Middle right and lower row show photos from the interior of the new office with a variety of items for sale to visitors, expanding from the previous postcard selection to books, t-shirts, prints, honey, and other branded items.

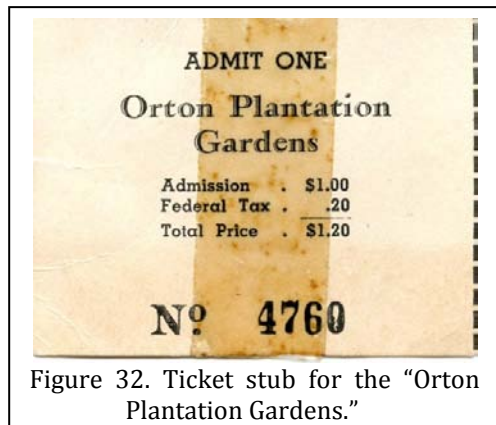


Figure 32. Ticket stub for the “Orton Plantation Gardens.”

David Sprunt’s Activities

In 2003, David Sprunt moved from Raleigh to take over the ground management of Orton. He later recalled that other family members were more focused on timber and “no one was really focused on the gardens.” As a result the property was becoming overgrown and there was little routine maintenance. As a result, he reported that it required three years (from 2002 to 2007) to clean out vegetation and rework the flower displays (“Sprunt Family Begins Reworking Orton Plantation Landscape,” *Star-News*, May 16, 2009).

In 2005 the caretaker’s house was demolished and a new dwelling was constructed on the same location. By October 2007 the dollhouse office was replaced with a modern building in which a much wider variety of items were offered for sale, including books, honey, t-shirts, and a variety of branded Orton products. Orton also began selling seeds for carnivorous plants through the Flytrap Company, advertised as “formerly owned by Stanley Rehder.”

In addition a pavilion was constructed, which could not only be rented for meetings and weddings, but which also served a wider variety of foods to Orton’s visitors.

Sometime afterwards a second greenhouse was constructed, although it appears to have been used almost solely for weddings.

An events coordinator, Abi Blackerby, was hired and the fields south of Eliga’s house

were cleared of vegetation to allow room for large party tents (“Sprunt Family Begins Reworking Orton Plantation Landscape,” *Star-News*, May 16, 2009).

Beginning about 2005 and extending at least through about 2009 Orton began advertising Bruce Williams, the host of the TV show “DownEast Gardener” as their Consulting Horticulturist. While it isn’t certain what he did in terms of Orton’s plants, he did provide lectures in the Pavilion.

In 2007 through 2009 Orton had a Grounds Manager, Randy Bridge. Bridge had previously worked in the grounds department at East Carolina University. During his time at Orton he lived in the newly constructed manager’s house, built in 2006.

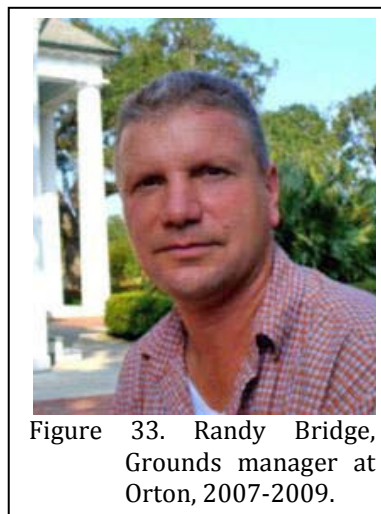


Figure 33. Randy Bridge, Grounds manager at Orton, 2007-2009.

There were apparently only four others working at Orton on the grounds. One of them was Clarence Jones, Orton’s longest serving employee. While well known, Jones remains something of a mystery. Not being recognized in any of the period census records, all of the information concerning his life comes from news accounts and the two lists of Orton employees.

The Orton employee lists show Clarence Jones (then about 32 years old), his wife, Evelyn (31), and three children, Lillian (11), Clarence, Jr. (9), and Josie Lee (8). One newspaper identifies



Figure 34. Clarence Jones at Orton (courtesy *Star-News*).

"Evelena, his wife of 64 years" ("Gardener Makes Orton Bloom," *Morning Star*, July 2, 1995). She died in 1999. Another article reports his birth as August 8, 1908 and that he was the youngest of five children. His father was Abraham Jones, "who operated the ferry between Market Street and Brunswick County." His grandfather is reported as William Jones, the operator of the first ferry ("Centenary Celebration Honors Longtime Orton Gardener," *Star News*, August 16, 2008). He reported beginning work at Orton in the late 1920s, and during Churchill Bragaw's time at Orton he taught Clarence to root, identify, and grow plants. Jones celebrated his 100th birthday at Orton on August 8, 2008.

Photographs and bits of information suggest that plants continued to be raised at Orton. While still being sold (see Figure 30), it may be that they were primarily raised for use on the tract. At this point there just isn't enough information to make an informed judgment. Regardless, there was little if any advertising and other nurseries had surpassed Orton's reputation.

Orton Greenhouses

The previous research has revealed that Orton's first greenhouse was built by 1939 and by 1940 there were two, both oriented east-west. By 1943 there may have been three greenhouses, ranging in size from 100 feet to 152 feet in length, based on the purchase of irrigation lines.

However, by 1949 the Draper film reveals at least one greenhouse built and in operation, oriented north-south.

This greenhouse, identified as Greenhouse 1 on Figure 35, was briefly examined in 2013, prior to its rehabilitation and integration into a renovated headhouse and a new horticultural library. Greenhouse architect James M. Smith briefly described the structure as being produced by the firm of Lord and Burnham of Irvington, New York,² with the 16-inch glass size suggesting an earlier structure, perhaps dating from the 1930s or 1940s (Smith 2013). Its dimensions of 100 feet 3 inches in length by 28 feet in width, is consistent with the 1942 irrigation line for a shed 100 by 28 feet.

In 2015 Greenhouse 1 was removed and rebuilt to connect the previously existing head house with a new Garden Library structure. The foundation walls and winding gear from the original house have been retained as a reminder of Orton's horticultural past.

Greenhouse 2, located on the west side of Orton Road, just north of Eliga's House, was in badly deteriorated condition and was removed in 2010. Greenhouse 3, the newest greenhouse, erected primarily for wedding events, has been removed and is seeking a new home.

There is a concrete block foundation at the northwest edge of the nursery area. Inside are

² Frederick Lord established Lord's Horticultural Manufacturing Company in 1856, moving to Irvington on Hudson in 1870. The name Lord and Burnham was adopted in 1872 when Lord's son-in-law, William Addison Burnham, joined the firm. The firm merged with other greenhouse firms, such as Hitchings & Co. in 1905, and Pierson U-Bar Co., and William Lutton Company. In 1946 the corporate structure was reorganized and all major Burnham subsidiaries were consolidated to form the Burnham Corporation. This corporation dissolved in 1987 and the company's archives were transferred to the New York Botanical Garden. Correspondence with the Special Collections, Research and Archives has failed to identify correspondence or plans specific to Orton Plantation.



Figure 35. Nursery structures at Orton in October 2010.



Figure 36. Greenhouse 1. Upper photos show the greenhouse prior to renovations looking southeast and south-southwest. Middle left photo shows the interior prior to renovation. Compare to Figures 22 and 30. Middle right photo shows the exterior after renovation, looking to the northwest. Lower photos show the renovated interior with many of local carnivorous plants.



Figure 37. Other Orton greenhouses. Top photo shows Greenhouse 2, looking to the south. Bottom photo shows Greenhouse 3, looking to the southeast. Both greenhouses have been removed.



Figure 38. Remnant of the camellia house, looking northwest.

a variety of very large camellias. The function of this structure is not clear, although it appears to be in the area identified on the Sturtevant drawing (Figure 12) as the “Camellia House.” Consequently, it seems likely that this was a structure where camellias could be kept under cover during the early nursery years. It has been preserved as remnant evidence of nursery operations (Figure 38).

Plants still play a role in the area. In November 2015 several individuals were charged with the theft of more than a thousand Venus flytraps from Orton property (“Bolivia Men Accused of Stealing 1,000+ Venus Flytraps from Orton Plantation,” *The Brunswick Beacon*, November 21, 2015).

The tradition of growing at Orton continues and evolves at Orton. The renovated Greenhouse 1 now contains a collection of native Insectivorous (carnivorous) plants. The purpose of the collection is to display, preserve, and maintain many of the threatened and endangered insectivorous plants that can be found at Orton, many of which are specific to the long leaf pine habitat ecosystem.

Summary Observations

The bulk of the readily available literature about Orton Plantation in Winnabow, North Carolina focuses on the plantation's colonial roots, ties to Roger Moore, and rich history. Almost nothing has been written about its twentieth century history, especially the nursery and gardens on the property. This brief document begins to compile that history, helping readers better understand the evolution of the plantation landscape during the past 100 years.

A vast amount of this document is based on the fortuitous preservation of about six years of records associated with the Orton Nursery and, to some degree, its garden operations. The research reminds us that the preservation – and interpretation – of twentieth century records are as important as research into the plantation's origins. Moreover, it may come as surprising to many readers that so little is known of events during the relatively recent past.

The Evolution of the Gardens and Nursery

While the story of the Orton gardens being opened to help raise funds for an injured cousin is often repeated, this research reveals a far more complex story.

In spite of the 1919 loss of the Kendal mansion, James Sprunt seemed focused on making Orton profitable; first growing rice and later experimenting with peanuts, corn, and cotton. While some plantings had occurred by 1910, the one photograph we have of the main house looks forlorn and not dramatically different than photographs years earlier.

It is clear that it was the involvement of James Sprunt's wife, Luola, who provided the

guiding force in the improvement and beautification of the property. It seems entirely possible that without her interest and the involvement of her brother, architect Kenneth Murchison, Jr., the gardens might never have developed as they did.

By 1911, Murchison's renovations of the mansion, coupled with extensive work in the yard surrounding the house, began to make Orton look very different. Even a quick comparison of the two landscapes shown in Figure 5 reveals the extent of modifications that took place in a single year.

By the early 1920s there is evidence of expanded ornamental plantings, including fruit trees, bulbs, banana shrubs, camellias, and azaleas – reflecting an interesting mix of exotic and indigenous plants.

In 1924 James Sprunt died, leaving an estate valued at over a million dollars and his son, James Laurence Sprunt, became the second life estate owner of Orton. He continued his father's conservative approach to plantation management, planting rice until about 1934, when we document the last shipping charge for the crop.

By the early 1930s the gardens were intermittently opened to the public and by 1938 were opened to the public indefinitely. Whether this was altruistic or was the first glimmer of a new business plan is uncertain.

During the early opening years we know that the Sprunts retained Robert Swan Sturtevant to provide ideas and, by the late 1930s, plans for the gardens. These plans are especially interesting since they help document the spatial arrangement of various plantation buildings and activities. They also reveal a "Green Yard" indicating that Orton was raising at least some of its own plants. In fact,

the accompanying notes reveal that Orton was already attempting to sell plants, Sturtevant questioning if this is really a useful idea (“even with visitors wanting plants I doubt if you will ever wish to supply anything except camellias and azaleas, possibly not even those”). Nevertheless, he provided recommendations for removing some plants, planting others (“planted out and allowed to die of neglect”), better display of some plants in tubs and pots, and creating frames for smaller stock.

Table 10.
Superintendents at Orton

Captain Samuel R. Chinnis	1885-1891
Captain J.C. Smith	1893
Mr. Padgett	1924
John E. Batchelor	1930-?
Henry Churchill Bragaw	1937-1941
Jim Ferger	1942-1946
Onis D. Hyatt	1947-1953
James Alexander Bogie	1954-1982
Bryan Patrick Marshburn	1982- 2005

The plant lists and documents surviving provide an exceptional glimpse of the gardens and vistas envisioned by Sturtevant. The nursery records also document that by the mid- to late-1930s James Laurence Sprunt was taking a very active interest in the gardens and, especially, camellia culture. Wading into the murky nomenclature of camellias he was warned by one nursery dealer, “very few Camellias are sold under the correct horticultural variety name and as several nurserymen have told me, it makes little difference what you call them, so long as the name helps to sell the plants.”

Sprunt’s plans for Orton seem to be summed up in a comment he made to another plant dealer, “we are commercializing Orton Plantation Garden this year on a large scale and the sight of the azaleas there is the best advertisement for the sale of the plant.” It seems that Sprunt was searching for something to replace rice as a stable commodity, something that would ensure the long-term success and stability of Orton, even perhaps something profitable that

he could leave his children.

Previously, Orton had a number of superintendents or managers. As far as we can determine, none had any special training or experience in horticulture or gardening, although several did come from farming backgrounds. They were, we suspect, cut from the cloth of antebellum overseers and focused primarily on control and management of the plantation’s African American laborers.

This changed dramatically in 1937 when James Laurence Sprunt hired a college trained forester and horticulturalist, Henry Churchill Bragaw, Jr.

Bragaw might well be described as a renaissance man. He worked very well with the African American laborers on Orton, earning their trust and admiration. He was a noted herpetologist, was versed in ornithology, was a serious photographer, demonstrated capability in promoting Orton, and readily adapted himself to horticultural activities. He created the first photographs (now sadly lost) of Orton and even created movies of the property which he showed to local garden clubs. He became a leader in camellia and azalea cultivation and tackled the confused nomenclature of the camellia plants.

Bragaw, as much as and perhaps even more than Sturtevant was responsible for the growth and development of the Orton gardens. He also developed the Orton Nursery, developing a program of rooting and grafting camellias. In an era when there were no readily available business plans for either gardens or nurseries, Bragaw managed in five years to make Orton well known and respected in both areas.

By 1940 Bragaw developed a folder or catalog with color pictures and a price list for the nursery plants. Even before this Bragaw had developed a printed price list for the nursery. Sales were made to individuals, retailers, and wholesalers. Bragaw also began a consignment business, allowing the sale of Orton plants throughout the North Carolina coastal region.

Bragaw had at least 300,000 camellia plants in the nursery in 1940, ranging in size from 4 to 10-inches, as well as hundreds of specimen plants. He frequently boasted that Orton had 350 varieties of camellias, with 275 varieties for sale. Orton was listed as a certified nursery with 3 acres of ornamental plants, as well as being a certified narcissus bulb grower.

Although Orton experimented with bulb production, that effort was apparently not profitable. Selling cut flowers was perhaps more profitable and was done throughout Bragaw's tenure at the plantation. It appears that the bulbs were primarily cultivated at Kendal and Lilliput, where a number of plants have naturalized and are still found. Bragaw even experimented with carnivorous plants, providing plants to the *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine. Efforts to sell camellia blossoms were not entirely satisfactory, although Orton got a tremendous amount of publicity from New York millinery designer G. Howard Hodge and his camellia hats in 1941. Otherwise the market for cut camellias was fickle and Orton was undercut in prices by larger firms that specialized in such sales.

Another venture was the selling of Christmas greens, begun while Bragaw was at Orton, but continued through the 1960s and later.

When Sam Nash, the brother of Annie Gray Nash, Laurence's wife, died in 1940 Bragaw sent Emma Lou Harrelson to Tarboro to take over Nash's nursery and landscape business. Contracts were fulfilled and the inventory was gradually decreased to the point that it could be closed, although when this occurred is not clear.

Bragaw's only real shortcoming was a lack of trained staff. Even there Bragaw appears to have taken steps to improve operations. It was under Bragaw's tutelage that Clarence Jones was introduced to gardening. Bragaw also promoted a local woman, Emma Lou Harrelson, to the head of the nursery operations. He also brought in a Harvard-trained intern, Robert Godfrey, to assist with horticultural operations.

Bragaw also initiated a forestry program at Orton, cutting pulp, poles, and even operating a saw mill on the plantation, although nothing in the records indicate its location. Bragaw also managed Orton's participation in a cooperative forest protection association that built fire towers, cleared fire lands, and fought forest fires. Practicing good stewardship, Bragaw also sought to re-establish both turkeys and quail at Orton. He brought in his classmate, Charles Fox, to manage the work for at least a year, perhaps longer. Fox then went on to a distinguished career with the North Carolina Forest Service.

The plantation appears to have ceased the cultivation of cash crops, instead planting graze or green manures for soil improvement.

Bragaw worked to establish a venereal clinic for the Orton workers in Southport, improved the sanitation of the plantation's privies, and even explored mosquito control. He mediated domestic disputes among the African Americans and organized a Christmas party for the plantation that continued for decades. During this period Orton had nearly 200 African Americans living or working on the property.

We are fortunate to have information on employee salaries for 1940 and, in addition, a very high quality oblique aerial photo of the nursery area that same year. The aerial shows two greenhouses running east-west, one very large slat house, and garden fields.

It is hard to image how Bragaw might have further altered the history of Orton had his life not been tragically cut short by the Second World War.

Sprunt certainly understood the benefit of having a trained horticulturalist since he immediately hired James Ferger to fill Bragaw's position (although it seems that Bragaw intended to come back to Orton after the war). While trained in horticulture and landscape, very little of Ferger's activities can be documented. Either he was not nearly as meticulous as Bragaw in retaining correspondence, or it has been lost since

his work at Orton. In any event, almost nothing remains except assorted invoices. What is noticeable is that payments, which had been made very promptly during Bragaw's time, were beginning to drag out to two or three months by the time of Ferger.

We can document little change in nursery or forestry activities. At the nursery, a third greenhouse may have been constructed, based on the purchase of three irrigation lines. We also have documentation for the use of 460 pounds of lead arsenate pesticidal dust in just two years. Assuming this level of use for a decade, over a ton of this pesticide was applied to a relatively small area of the Orton property. At least some amount of calcium arsenate was also used; the calcium form is far more soluble in water and thus more toxic.

There was some change in agricultural activities. Orton planted a small amount of tobacco in 1943, but that may have been a one-time venture. While graze and pasture continued to be planted, there is some evidence there may have been some truck grown at Orton in addition to gardens for the workers.

Ferger left Orton, establishing a landscape service with his brother, Carl S. Ferger, sometime in 1947. By June 1947 the Orton nursery manager was Onis D. Hyatt, another college trained horticulturist. We have found no files from his work at Orton, although some documentation is provided by news accounts and an article in the *Northern California Camellia Society Official Bulletin*.

It was during his tenure at Orton that Tom Draper and his wife, Florinda Balbin, made the film "Orton Plantation Under Spring Skies." Evolving from Bragaw's movies, the Draper film was, for the time, a masterpiece of promotion. An independent cinematographer has praised the quality of the Draper film, noting that at least four additional reels of Draper films may be present (Edward Holt, personal communication 2016).

Also during Hyatt's time at Orton the

camellia petal blight was discovered. Anecdotal accounts suggest that it was this disease which began the decline of the Orton nursery. We believe the evidence is clear that nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, Orton almost immediately devised a procedure to remove soil from camellia roots and repack the roots in sawdust or peat moss, thereby avoiding the spread of the disease and allowing shipments throughout the region. In fact, over 47,000 camellias were treated and shipped in this manner between September 1950 and March 1951.

It was during this period that Hyatt brought in his University of Florida professor, John V. Watkins, to Orton for consultation, perhaps on mitigating the blight. Unfortunately, we have been unable to identify any surviving papers from Dr. Watkins.

There is virtually no mention of the disease in either newspapers or the camellia publications. The quarantine proved to accomplish little and when various states were consulted, there was almost no interest in the disease or quarantine.

Within a year after the departure of Hyatt in 1953, Alex Bogie was made the plantation manager. Bogie, of course, had been on Orton and working in the gardens, nursery, and fields, since at least 1940 and likely by 1936, gradually learning the trade and working his way up from Assistant Manager. Thus, while James Laurence Sprunt's son Kenneth may have been the face of Orton or the General Manager, it was Alex Bogie - and his family that included Jane Bogie (his wife), Harry Bogie (his son), and Eliga Robbins (a son-in-law) - that handled the day-to-day operations.

During Bogie's tenure several architects visited Orton and made recommendations. The first of these, in late 1954, was Charles F. Gillette, with whom Bragaw had earlier corresponded. He provided several plans and two pages of recommendations. The plans are difficult to reconcile with the early 1940 aerial. However, it doesn't appear likely that the recommendations were acted on and

about all the document suggests is that there was no thought given to winding down nursery operations since Gillette shows a variety of areas for propagation and sales.

By late 1957 the Sprunts retained architect Morley Jeffers Williams and his wife, Nathalia Williams, to do some work at Orton. None of this work seems to have impacted the nursery operations.

Nursery operations, by all accounts, continued unabated, although it seems likely that fewer cuttings took place. The nursery office was in the Sprunt's dollhouse, which was present in the nursery area by at least the early 1950s.

It was during Alex Bogie's time at Orton that James Laurence Sprunt died, in 1973. Sprunt's widow, Annie Gray Nash Sprunt died five years later in 1978. The sons differed dramatically on the future of Orton and in 1982 James Laurence Sprunt Jr. (1915-2003) brought suit for the division of Orton Plantation. About that same time Bogie retired, leaving Orton after a lifetime of work on the property.

Besides the internal family problems, the loss of James Laurence Sprunt and his life estate resulted in the plantation taking a huge write-down on the nursery stock – nearly \$73,000. Nursery operations, however, continued albeit at a seemingly reduced level.

Instead of a forced division, the suit brought by James Laurence Sprunt, Jr. was settled by the sale of his undivided one-fourth interest in Orton Plantation to his three half-brothers, Kenneth Murchison Sprunt, Samuel Nash Sprunt, and Laurence Gray Sprunt, in April 1984.

In 1982 Pat Marshburn was hired as the new manager, replacing the retired Alex Bogie. Marshburn served as manager until January 2005. In 2003 David Sprunt, Kenneth Sprunt's son, became involved in the nursery and gardens with a new focus on clearing out overgrown vegetation and replacing a number of older buildings, including the nursery office and the overseer's

house.

Randy Bridge, a grounds supervisor at East Carolina University, was hired by Orton from 2007 through 2009 to revitalize the landscape.

Many of the earlier activities were expanded. The ticket and nursery office, which earlier sold only drinks, crackers, and postcards, was replaced with a pavilion selling sandwiches and other refreshments. The new office began selling t-shirts, books, artwork of Orton, honey, and other branded items.

An events coordinator was hired to maximize the wedding and meeting potential of Orton. A new greenhouse was converted into a shelter for weddings and other events.

Many of the developing plans for Orton went unfulfilled by the Sprunts selling Orton to a descendant of Roger Moore, Louis Moore Bacon, in 2010. In their place a new vision began to emerge, continuing the evolutionary progression of the Orton Gardens.

Dramatic changes in ornamental plantings occurred in 2012-2013 with the installation of new gardens around the Orton mansion and in front of Luola's Chapel. While some of the large camellias, azaleas, and other flowering shrubs were kept in the gardens, others were relocated, and many were removed. A large live oak that stood at the southwest corner of the mansion was relocated to the front lawn, where it was placed to mirror the historic live oak that appears in many photographs from around 1909. In addition, the dense grove of trees to the south of Luola's Chapel was cleared to create an open lawn, except for the trees immediately around the chapel. The front garden at Luola's Chapel was renovated using some elements of the original 1916-era garden (Knott et al. 2014:184).

It is useful to understand that gardens, such as those at Orton, are both deliberately created and highly organized, but they are not static or relic landscapes. Instead, they are changing and evolving. As Jackson observed, the

landscape “is *never* simply a natural space, a feature of the natural environment.” Instead, “every landscape is the place where we establish our own human organization of space and time” (Jackson 1984:156). Consequently, concepts such as “integrity,” have meaning only when viewed from a static point or with specific research interests in mind.

Orton Catalogs

Surprisingly few institutions have examples of Orton’s nursery catalogs. A search of The Council on Botanical and Horticultural Libraries’ member institutions found only the

The evidence we have found suggests that around 4,000 to 6,000 catalogs were published yearly, but like most promotional literature were thumbed through and then thrown away. It was very surprising that in the midst of Bragaw’s extensive correspondence, not a single catalog or price list was tucked away.

We see the first surviving wholesale price list from 1954-1955, breaking tradition with Bragaw’s early approach of quoting wholesale prices depending on circumstances. It also appears that the detail, size, and use of color declined through time, until the late 1950s, when Orton was simply distributing mimeographed sheets of information.

A careful examination of the surviving catalogs provides some interesting data on nursery operations. The size and quality of the catalogs gradually declines over time. In 1946-1947 there were 32 pages, some in color. Plants were carefully described in considerable detail and it seems clear that the publication was not just promotional, but also

educational. In fact, one camellia enthusiast remarked, “Your new Plant List was received yesterday . . . I consider it a valuable pamphlet. The azalea and camellia cultural directions alone are worth a great deal to a grower and lover of these plants” (letter from Mrs. J.I. Aphin, Hattiesburg, Mississippi to Bragaw dated December 27, 1939). By 1957, the catalog had been reduced to 2 mimeographed pages.

Date	Brief Title	Brief Description	Institution
1946-1947	Catalog and Price List	Color covers; 4 pg in color	4
1947-1948	Retail Price List	-	1
1949	Retail Catalog	Color covers; history; descriptions	1
1950-1951	Retail Price List	-	1
1951-1952	Catalog and Price List	-	1, 2, 3, 4
1952-1953	Retail Catalog	Color covers; 4 pg in color	1
1953-1954	Retail Catalog and Price List	Same as previous edition	1, 2, 4
1954-1955	Retail Price List	-	1
1954-1955	Wholesale Price List	-	1
1955-1956	Retail Price List	-	1
Fall 1956	Retail Price List	Mimeo, legal size, 2 pages	1
Fall 1957	Retail Price List	Same as previous edition	1
1957-1958	Wholesale Price List	1 pg.	1

Institution:

1. Ethel Z. Bailey Horticultural Catalogue Collection, Cornell University
2. New York Botanical Gardens, Mertz Library
3. Special Collections and Archives Research Center, Oregon State University Library
4. Tidewater Camellia Club
5. Orton Plantation

New York Botanical Garden held catalogs. Searches of other institutions produced one catalog at the Special Collections and Archives Research Center, Oregon State University Library. The largest single collection is found in the Ethel Z. Bailey Horticultural Catalogue Collection at Cornell University. To date, 13 extant Orton Plantation Nursery catalogs have been identified and are identified in Table 11.

Historic research reveals that Orton price lists were published by at least 1939 and catalogs date to at least 1940. Thus, we are missing the earliest five or six years of nursery catalogs.

Figure 35 provides a graphic representation of the number of plant listings over time. Most dramatic is the decline in the listing of

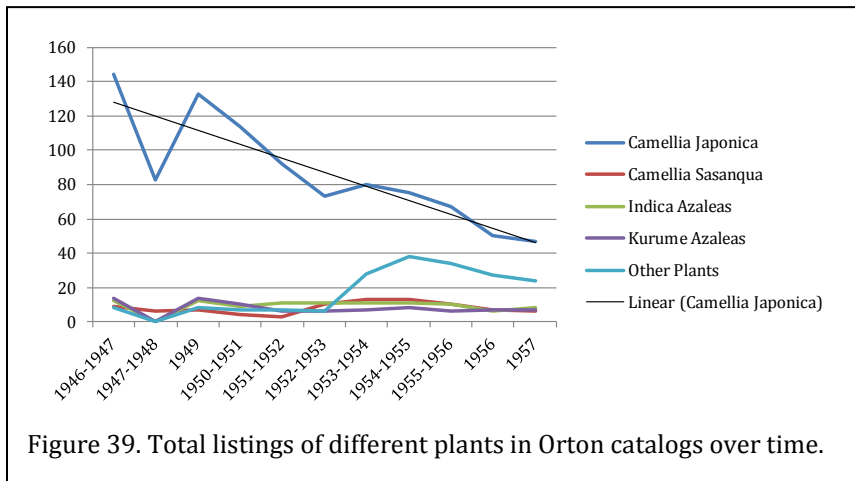


Figure 39. Total listings of different plants in Orton catalogs over time.

Japonica camellias, from 144 in the first available catalog to only 47 by 1957, about a decade later. These figures are far short of the 275 varieties of camellias that Bragaw frequently boasted of having available for sale.

This does not, however, mean that the nursery was stagnant. Almost every year's catalog introduced one or two new varieties for sale. For example, in 1953-1954 Orton introduced September Morn, a synonym for Shirabyôshi. The following year, Orton offered one-year grafts of the new camellia Bernice Boddy, an orthographic error for Berenice Boddy, which was patented in 1943.

In addition, the catalogs clearly reveal that camellias which began as rare (and most costly varieties), generally became considered standard varieties as the numbers propagated increased and demand was met. There are a few examples, such as Anne Lindburg that fluctuated between rare and standard.

New varieties of azaleas were also introduced by Orton. For example, Maiden Blush, an Indica Azalea was introduced by Orton in 1953-1954. Some azaleas were also dropped. For example, the Vesuvius variety was offered only early, being dropped by 1951.

In many cases plants were removed and subsequently reintroduced in their catalogs. Whether this was simply a matter of insufficient

supply and an effort to create more rootstock, or if it was clever marketing to drive up demand can't be determined with the information available.

It is interesting that the "other plants" offered by Orton increased from just a few to over 30. The initial few being offered included the banana shrub, Cherokee rose, Lady Banks' rose, pyracantha, sweet olive, tea olive, winter daphne, and yew. This suggests that the vast majority of the early plants

being acquired by Bragaw were not intended for sale, but were for use in the Orton gardens. The increase in the varieties for sale suggests that the nursery was recognizing the demand for "one-stop shopping" as home-ownership increased.

A Different Interpretation of the Nursery's Decline

We have previously dismissed camellia petal blight as the cause of the nursery's decline. This is based on how quickly Orton devised a plan to mitigate the problem and the continued large quantity of plants that Orton shipped out. But, if the causative agent wasn't this disease, what resulted in the gradual decline in Orton's horticultural importance?

We have already hinted at the answer, showing the growth of the nursery industry between 1936 and 1987 and tying that growth to the nesting instinct that developed after World War II.

When Orton began its nursery, there were only a few hundred nurseries in North Carolina and virtually no dealers. While home ownership during this time was very low, those wanting plants had relatively few nurseries or dealers from which to acquire those plants.

Between 1940 and 1950 home ownership

increased by over 10%. The nursery business is driven by new home construction and healthy consumer spending – both of which were occurring in the 1950s and this should have made Orton prosper (Anonymous 2014:2). But Orton did not prosper, at least partially because the number of nurseries tripled and the plantation faced fierce competition. Simply put, we believe that Orton was successful in the local setting with limited competition, marketing “plants of distinction.” But as competition became more aggressive, they floundered. Even early, as Orton attempted to go head-to-head with large northeastern florists selling cut flowers, they found competition difficult. Their laborers were not sufficiently trained or careful and James Laurence Sprunt seemed frustrated at the realities facing him, rather than focused on improvements and expansion.

Orton continued to rely on small advertisements in local papers and *The State Magazine*. Their only large client seems to have been Rose’s. Typical is a 1957 advertisement in which Rose’s 5-10-25¢ Stores announced, “Just Received from Orton Plantation Nursery Azaleas in Bloom . . . Camellias” (*The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, North Carolina), March 20, 1957, pg. 29).

They were competing with a variety of businesses, such as furniture stores, hardware stores, and even nurseries states away, which used much larger ads, offering plants that might not have been “distinctive,” but were certainly affordable and enticing. Examples included

“We are receiving 1 to 2 truckloads each week from the South’s largest nursery. By buying in large quantities we can sell at Low Prices . . . John Parham Furniture Co., Latta, SC” (*The Robesonian* (Lumberton, NC), November 12, 1948, pg. 4).

“A.R. Minnix Nurseries of Columbus, Georgia Now Located in Winston Salem, N.C. Special

Sale . . . Azaleas \$5/12 . . . Camellias \$2.50 - \$5” (*The High Point Enterprise* (High Point, North Carolina), November 19, 1950, pg. 1).

“For Sale: Well rooted camellia and azalea 10 for \$1 . . . Ford’s Nursery, Magnolia, Miss” (*The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, North Carolina), April 11, 1951, pg. 20).

“Cook’s Azaleas and Camellias of Spartanburg, S.C. Annual Spring Sale . . . Azalea plants \$1.50/10 plants . . . Camellias \$3.75” (*The Highpoint Enterprise* (Highpoint, North Carolina), April 7, 1952, pg. 8).

“First time in Burlington . . . Sears Garden Shop . . . Camellias 2.99 . . . Fruit Trees 1.59 (*The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, North Carolina), February 11, 1954, pg. 6).

Facing this increased competition, Hyatt was replaced not by another professional horticulturist, but rather by an individual without professional training in 1954. While it is certain that Alex Bogie had outstanding experience, he was not equipped with the experience to look for new marketing, new practices, or new plants. He was only able to continue based on his training.

The Orton Plantation Nursery collapsed primarily because it was unable to compete in new times that required different marketing and trained professionals.

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Chicora Foundation, Inc.
PO Box 8664 • 861 Arbutus Drive
Columbia, SC 29202-8664
Tel: 803-787-6910
www.chicora.org